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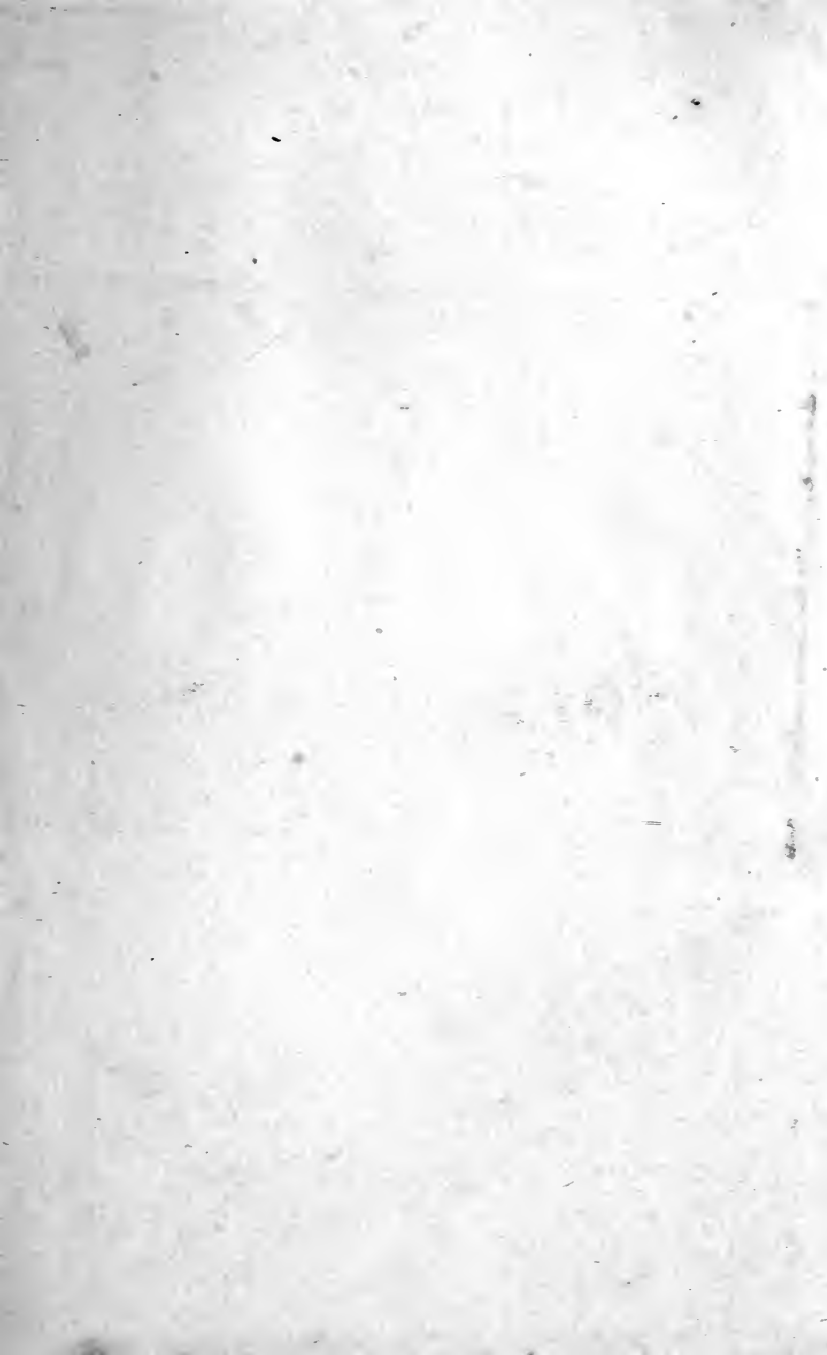
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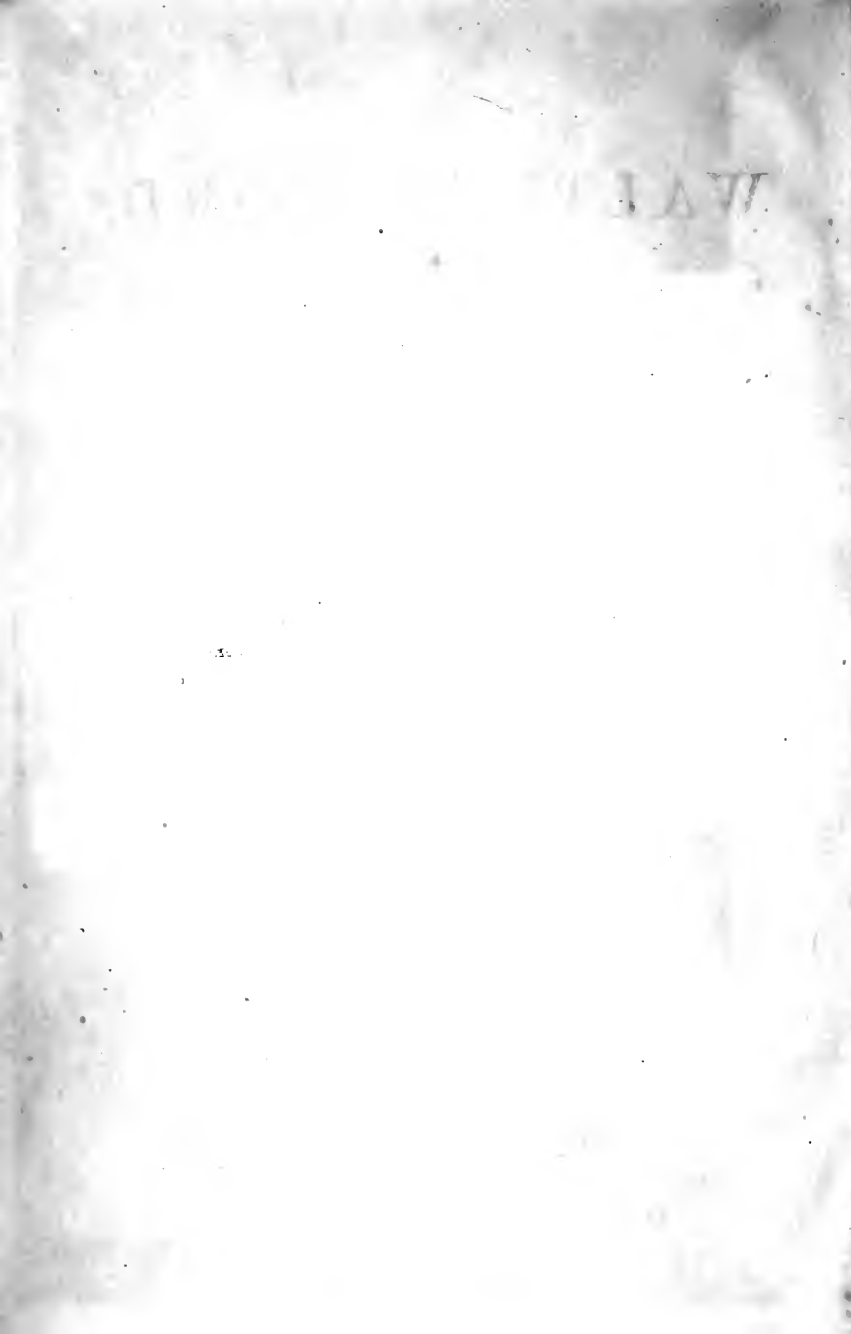
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WALTER'S WORD.



WALTER'S WORD.

A Nobel.

BY

JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD," "AT HER MERCY," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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TO

LESLIE STEPHEN,

This Book is Dedicated

BY HIS FRIEND,

JAMES PAYN.

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WALTER'S WORD.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE SMOKING-CARRIAGE.

IN a quarter of an hour the mid-day express will leave the terminus at Paddington for the west, and the platform is beginning to fill. Paterfamilias, with his mountains of luggage and oceans of children, is already there. The fidgety maiden lady who "always likes to be in time," has been there ten minutes ago, and has gone by mistake by "the parliamentary"—a literal exemplification of "more haste less speed," since it "shunts" at Slough, to enable the express to pass. The old gentleman who prefers to "start comfortably" is ensconced in his favourite corner

of the carriage, has acquired his pile of newspapers, seen his "traps" put into the next compartment, and with his head out of window, and his travelling-cap upon it, is urging the guard to signal "All right," since there is surely nothing more to wait for. The two nervous sisters, who, when they must needs travel on "those horrid railways," always do so together, that in death they may not be divided, are sitting, silent, hand in hand, hoping the best, and expecting the worst: their advertisement, addressed "To those who prefer the road to the rail, and are willing to share the expenses of posting to Exeter," having met with no response: they were "journey proud," and could eat no breakfast; but they have some sandwiches in a hand-bag, of which they will partake at Swindon, when the train (thank Heaven!) is stationary for ten minutes, and all danger, save that of being run into, is temporarily suspended: as for getting out, that is out of the question, for these horrible trains never wait for ladies, and they would be sure to be left behind. The bride and bridegroom about to pass their honeymoon in Devonshire have also

come, with the intention of securing a coupé, and are very much disgusted to find that there is no such carriage to be had ; Charles, who has three hundred pounds a year in the Customs, is half disposed to take a compartment to themselves ; a design which Angelina (already wife-like) combats on the reasonable score of expense ; it is true that there is one carriage with a door in the middle, but the gentleman departing quietly from his creditors is already in possession of its most secluded corner, and they come upon him unawares with a mutual shock. As for the business-men, to whom time (they say) is “such an object ;” and the young gentlemen who never hurry themselves ; and the young gentlemen who think it fine “to shave the train ;” and the ladies who “never have a notion of what o’clock it is”—these will not be here for the next twelve minutes, if they are so fortunate as to arrive in time at all. Of young gentlemen, indeed, there are but two as yet arrived, and these two of the very class that you would have expected to be among the latest. They are both well dressed, though one more fashionably than the other ; they are of too tender years

(unless they have been very "imprudent") to have any domestic ties, since, in the eye of the law, one is little more than "an infant," and the other only his senior by a few years; and they are in a smoking-carriage, which at present they have all to themselves. The anomaly of their being so much before their time seems to strike the younger of the two as it does ourselves, for he removes his pipe to remark: "I hope you have brought me here early enough, Selwyn; you did not use to be so punctual in your college days, if I remember right: I suppose it is the discipline of the Crimea which has effected the reform."

"Well, you see, old fellow, with a game-arm" (his left arm is in a sling) "and a game-leg" (he has limped across the platform with the aid of his friend, it must be owned without much difficulty), "one feels a little helpless; and hurry and bustle are to a poor cripple like myself——"

"My dear fellow," interrupts the other effusively, his comely face blushing to the roots of his brown beard, "don't say another word; I am ashamed of myself for having forgotten your misfortune even for an

instant. I ought to have four legs myself—to be such a brute.”

He leans across and pats the knee of the uninjured leg of his companion, an affectionate impulse strange to behold in one of his muscular and manly appearance, and which evidences, one would say, a very tender heart. He has not been thoughtless in his acts, in spite of that little verbal slip, for he has not only seen to everything, but taken as much care to make the other comfortable, as though he were a sick child. If he showed impatience about the train, he shows it now in a much greater degree with himself, twisting threads of his silken beard as though he would tear them out, and looking volumes of penitence out of his large soft brown eyes. “What an idiot I am,” he mutters: “a man that would say things like that” (he is referring to his malapropos observation) “would say *anything*, and steal the coppers from a blind man’s tray.

His companion, quite unconscious of these ejaculations, is gazing out of window, watching the platform as it fills with its hurrying throng: a photographer would have an excellent chance of taking him, so intent is his

expression of interest, and this is the portrait that would result. A lean, dark face, with well-formed and what is called speaking features ; the mouth hard when at rest, but capable of much expression, and improved rather than otherwise by its delicate black moustache ; the eyes large and lustrous, but without the softness that is the characteristic of his friend's ; the nose aquiline, the forehead high : altogether a very handsome face, nor marred—to the female eye at least—by a certain haughtiness of aspect. When we add (for so far does he lean out of window that we get a “ quarter-length”) of him that his left arm lies in a sling, it is clear that he must needs present an image as dangerous to woman's heart as he did but a few months back to England's foes, when, with that reckless few, he flew across the cannon-swept plain of Balaklava, and sabred the Russians at their guns.

“ By Jupiter, there she is !” cried he excitedly, and beckoning with eager joy to some one in the passing throng.

“ What !” exclaims his companion, in a tone of astonishment ; “ surely not your——”

“ Yes, it's Lotty,” interrupts the other, in

a tone which has triumph in it as well as pleasure. "You don't know what a trump she is. I thought my letter would "fetch" her. —Why, my darling, this *is* kind."

These last words were addressed to a young girl of singular beauty, who had hurried up, at his signal to the carriage-door; she was tall and well shaped, with a head crowned by bright brown hair, and "a love of a bonnet," with delicate blonde features, that spoke of gentle tendance and refinement, and with her air and attire breathing of luxury and the power that belongs to wealth. The expression of this young woman's face, as she caught sight of the wounded soldier, was (when we consider these attributes) a marvel to behold. If she had been a slave, and he a prince, nay, if she had been a Russian serf, and he the Czar, her king and priest in one, it could not have expressed a more devoted and submissive admiration. An instant before, she had been moving with stately dignity, and that consciousness of superiority to those about her—consciousness of having more of "style," that is, and being better dressed—of which women are so demonstrative, and now, having suddenly darted

through the crowd like a boy after a dropped apple—she is standing by the carriage door, flushed, palpitating, and speechless, with her right hand clasped in his, as though defying steam-power itself to part them.

“This is *very, very* good of you,” continued the captain tenderly.

“*Good* of me, Reggie! why, when you wrote——” Then she stopped, and the flush mounted to her brow, as she saw for the first time that she and her lover were not alone.

“That’s only Litton, my dear,” explained the captain assuringly; “you’ve often heard me speak of Walter Litton.”

“Oh yes, indeed,” said she, with a sweet smile, as she disengaged her hand from Selwyn’s grasp, and offered it to his friend: “his name is very familiar to me—and welcome.”

“It was now Mr. Litton’s turn to blush, and he did so very thoroughly. He had by no means so much confidence in his own merits—perhaps he had none, as he had certainly no wounded arm to show in proof of them—as his companion; in his eyes, every woman was hedged about with a certain divinity; and one so beautiful and

winning as this sweet-voiced girl, he thought he had never beheld before. He was a painter, not only by profession, but by natural calling, and beauty, whether in face or landscape, had a marvellous charm for him. Moreover, as this face flashed upon him, it had begotten the thought: "If I were a favourite of Fortune instead of a penniless painter, and might make bold to ask her for the highest bliss she could bestow on mortal, I would ask her for this woman to be my wife." The wish died in its birth, for he instantly remembered that her love was plighted to his friend; but for all that, his soul was lost in glamour, his ready tongue was for the moment bewitched, when she made him that gracious speech.

"Walter is modest, and you overcome him," said the captain pleasantly. Then he whispered in her bent-down ear: "How I wish, my darling, you were coming with me to-day, instead of bidding me good-bye for heaven knows how long."

"Ah, how I wish I were!" was the hushed response, and the tears rushed to her eyes.

In the silence that followed, the harsh

platform bell began to knell, and the warning voice: "All take your seats for the south," rang hoarsely out. "To have seen me but for these fleeting moments is scarce worth the pain, Lotty."

"Oh yes, it is well worth it," answered she, no longer able to prevent the pearly tears falling one by one down her now pale cheeks. "It is something to think of afterwards."

"Look here!" cried the captain eagerly; "why not come with us as far as Reading? you will just catch the up-express there, and be back in town before six. None but Lilian need ever know."

A look of troubled joy came into her face. "How nice that would be," murmured she; "but then——"

"Now, miss, you must please stand back," said the platform guard; "the train is moving."

"This lady is coming with us," exclaimed the captain quickly; and before a word of remonstrance could pass her lips, the door was opened, the official handed her deftly in, and the train glided softly past the lingering crowd of those who had come to

say "good-bye," and to which she herself had a moment before belonged.

"Oh, Reggie," exclaimed the girl in frightened accents, as the train steamed out of the station, and the full consciousness of her audacity smote upon her for the first time. "And it's a smoking-carriage too!"

"Not *now*," said Walter Litton, smiling, as he emptied out of the window the pipe which he had held concealed in his hand from the moment of her appearance.

"Oh, I am so sorry," said she earnestly. "I don't at all object to smoking; I rather like it."

"You mean, you like to see *others* smoke," observed the captain, laughing. "Well, you shall see *me*. Litton had only a pipe—the contents of which were, moreover, almost exhausted—but it really would be a sacrifice to throw away a cigar like this."

"You're a naughty, selfish man," said Lotty, with such a loving stress upon each adjective, that you might have imagined she was eulogizing the dead.

"My dear, the doctors recommend it," answered the captain mildly: "all our men that have been badly hit—unless they were

shot through the jaw—were enjoined to smoke the best tobacco, and very often.”

“Poor fellows!” ejaculated Lotty pityingly. “I am sure they deserve the best of everything.”

“One of them has *got* the best of everything,” whispered the captain—“at least, so far as Reading.”

Lotty sighed.

“I believe I was very wrong to come, Reggie; the people stared so at me as we came out of the station. What *must* they have thought?”

“The people always do stare,” was the contemptuous rejoinder; “but I never heard of their thinking.”

“But I am afraid that it *was* wrong,” persisted she, “and that everybody must think so. “Don’t you think, Mr. Litton, it was a wrong thing to do?”

This was rather a poser; for Walter Litton *did* think it was so; as wrong a thing, that is, as so exquisite a being as Lotty was capable of; that is to say, he thought it injudicious, rash, and a little “fast:” a thing which, if he had been in his friend’s position, he would certainly not

have permitted, far less have invited and pressed a young lady to do. In his own mind, he blamed the captain very much, but he was not so bold as to say so: he felt that that would be much more dangerous than to blame Lotty herself.

“There can be no harm in it whatever,” answered he, “if, as Selwyn says, the up-express can be caught so conveniently at Reading. Our train stops nowhere else, so we cannot be intruded upon by strangers; otherwise, that would certainly be embarrassing. As it is, you go back to town in the ladies’ carriage, and no one need be any the wiser.”

There was no very high morality in this speech of Walter Litton’s, it must be owned; but let the reader (male) put himself in his place; he could not call her “a bold creature,” and prophesy that harm would come of it—like a woman.

No more questions of conscience were put for his decision, and he hid himself at once behind the broad sheet of his newspaper, and left the lovers to themselves. It was a somewhat wearisome situation for one with so delicate a sense of what was due to

his fellow-creatures ; for when he had read one sheet, he had still to keep it up before him for the sake of appearances, or rather in order to ignore them. He did not dare turn the paper over : " the liberty of the press " was denied to him. An accidental glance had shown his two companions in such very earnest converse, that their lips seemed inclined to touch. He could not well cry " Ahem, ahem ! " before removing the obstacle between them and him ; and so he remained in durance. Stone walls, however, do not a prison make, and much less those of paper ; his thought was free, though always within honest bounds of licence. He thought no more of Lotty as of one with whom he had fallen in love at first sight, but as of a sister who had become betrothed to his friend ; and of her future. She was, he knew, the daughter of some wealthy " self-made " man—Brown by name, and something, he did not know what, by *trade*—and that her father was set determinately against the match. If he himself had been in Brown's place, he might (he owned) have been of the same opinion ; not because his friend was poor

(which was the obstacle in this case, Selwyn had told him), but because he did not think him likely to make a good husband. He was a good friend—or at least Litton had always persuaded himself so—genial, witty, bold, an excellent companion, and a man who had been a general favourite at college. Yet it was said of him, that if a room, no matter how many were its occupants beside himself, had but one arm-chair in it, Selwyn was sure to get it.

Now, in a friend, this might be overlooked; indeed it was so in Selwyn's case. His friends, and Litton least of all, did not grudge him the arm-chair, though he always got it; but in a husband this was not a promising trait. It was unpleasant to reflect on it. Half an hour before, Walter would have been ashamed to have found himself dwelling on "dear old Selwyn's" little weaknesses; but that was before he had seen Lotty, his *sister* (you see), as he was supposing her; and, without doubt, Selwyn had behaved very selfishly in getting her to come to Reading. There were risks in it—none to him, but all to her—such as he should not have allowed

her to run, and which, as her brother, he (Litton) resented. Suppose she were to miss the up-train, or her absence were discovered at home, or some acquaintance were to recognise her as she left the carriage at Reading. Any one of these unpleasant accidents might happen, and the consequences to her might be very serious. There was no knowing what a "self-made" man (probably intensely "respectable") might do, on hearing of such an escapade in a member of his family; it might be even the cause of an estrangement between them, though that, indeed, would be likely to throw her into her lover's arms, which was the very thing, perhaps, by-the-bye, that Selwyn——

"That is a pretty plan to impute to your old friend," here interpolated the voice of Conscience. "Why if this girl had not been so uncommonly good-looking, and taken your precious 'artistic' fancy, Master Walter Litton, you would never have attained this lofty elevation of ideas: you might have gone up a little way, I don't deny, but not so high as all this. Moreover, it is a sheer assumption that anything

like an elopement was contemplated. How could Reginald Selwyn know that this young lady would come to the platform to see him off to Cornwall? The whole affair was evidently the work of a moment; and yet you were about to attribute a design—and a very mean one—to the lad who, when you were schoolboys together, had often stood between you and harm, and used his three years of seniority, and the superior strength that went with them, to your advantage and succour; to your old chum at college; to the man who went down into the Valley of Death among those heroic Six Hundred, and whose wounds should be mouths to speak for him to the heart of every fellow-countryman. For shame, Master Walter!”

Something like this did really pass through the young painter's mind, and covered him with self-reproach; and all this time the two objects of his thoughts were sitting hand in hand immediately opposite to him, billing and cooing, but unseen, and almost unheard. All that he knew, and could not help knowing, was, that Selwyn was pleading earnestly for something or

other—advocating some injudicious and rash course of conduct, as was only too likely—and that Lotty was objecting to it, if those gentle tones of remonstrance could be called objecting.

At last, as the train shot through a station, with a whirl like the rising of some enormous pheasant, the captain observed aloud : “ Why, that’s Twyford, isn’t it ? ”

“ Yes,” answered Litton : “ the next station, I believe, is Reading.”

He took up his *Bradshaw* to see whether this was the case ; but hardly had he begun to peruse it before he uttered an exclamation of horror : “ Look here ; Selwyn, you are quite wrong about the up-express : it does not start from Reading for the next two hours.”

“ Are you sure, my dear fellow ? Let’s look.—Well, that’s exceedingly inconvenient. I can’t imagine how I could have made such a mistake.”

“ The only thing to be done,” said Walter, moved by Lotty’s white and frightened face, “ is for us two to get out also, and keep this young lady company ; our time is no object, or, at least, none in com-

parison with her staying at the station for so long alone——”

“Oh, I don’t mind *that*,” interrupted Lotty, in terrified tones; “but what am I to do about papa? I shall not be back in London till eight o’clock. He will be certain to find it all out—O dear, O dear!”

“He will be quite certain, Lotty,” said Selwyn, with earnest gravity: “and this necessitates the step to which I have been trying to persuade you all along. This mischance may be turned into the happiest stroke of fortune, if you will only take my advice; and such an opportunity will assuredly never happen again.”

“O Reggie, but I dare not. Dear papa would never forgive me.”

“He will not forgive you for coming down with me to Reading and going back again, and will keep a very tight hand on you in future, you may be sure, Lotty; but he will forgive you if you don’t go back at all, when he finds there is no use in being in a passion, since the mischief is done, and you have become my wife.”

“Your wife!” exclaimed Litton. “You must not do anything rash, Selwyn.”

“Rash! no, quite the reverse, my good fellow. This young lady has promised to marry me sooner or later; that has been settled long ago, but her father will not consent to it. He says ‘never;’ so it is no more disobedient in her to marry me now than it would be ten years hence. By this lucky piece of imprudence, she will have already offended him beyond measure; her life will henceforth be made a burden to her under his roof. She can’t possibly get back, you see, without the most tremendous row; and after that, there would be the other row, when we were married. Now, why shouldn’t we have the two rows in one, and get it over for good and all? When the knot is once tied, the old gentleman, perceiving it is of no use to anathematize us, is all the more likely to listen to reason.”

“But really, Selwyn, this is a most serious step——”

“Of course it is, my dear Litton,” interrupted the captain; “it’s the most important step in the world just now, but only to two people in it—to her and to me. Lotty is of age, and can judge for herself.”

To this speech, so significant in its tone,

Walter Litton did not know what to reply. The affair was certainly not his business, nor did any valid objections to Selwyn's arguments occur to him, save one—namely, that the young lady in her present position, separated from those who had the right to give her good advice, and urged by one whom she passionately adored, was not a free agent.

"I don't know what to do for the best," cried Lotty, wringing her hands. "Oh, why was I so foolish as to get into the train!"

"Not foolish, darling, only so fond," whispered the captain. "You acted as your heart dictated, and that is a guide to which it is always safe to trust. So far from regretting your position, you should rejoice that it has placed the happiness within our grasp which sooner or later we had promised ourselves. Life is too short for such procrastination."

"Oh, what will papa say?" sobbed Lotty, uncomforted by this philosophy, but at the same time obviously giving way to the Inevitable, which in her idea was Captain Reginald Selwyn.

"I can very easily guess, my darling,"

said he smiling. "There will be an eruption of the volcano; burning lava—some very strong language indeed—will stream forth in every direction, and overwhelm the solid Duncombe and his myrmidons. Then after awhile there will be silence and calm. The crater will cease to agitate itself; 'What's done can't be undone,' it will sigh, and nobody will be a penny the worse."

"A penny the worse," reiterated Litton softly: "is it possible he is calculating upon getting money with her?" All his uncharitable thoughts regarding his friend had gathered strength again; he could not forgive him for taking advantage of this girl's love and isolation.

"What will Lily say?" sobbed Lotty, after a long pause, during which the whistle sounded shrilly, to proclaim their approach to the station.

"She will say, 'How lucky dear Lotty is to have married the man of her choice. Shall I ever have the like good fortune?' And, in the meantime, being the kindest-hearted girl (save one) in the whole world, she will employ herself in effecting a reconciliation between your father and ourselves. Come,

darling, the time has come for your final decision; be firm, be courageous——”

“Selwyn,” interrupted Litton abruptly, “there is one thing that has been forgotten: with whom is this young lady to reside until you can procure a marriage licence? Have you any female relative in Cornwall who can receive her? Otherwise, the whole plan must needs fall to the ground; that is positively certain.”

“You are as right as the Bank,” said the captain admiringly. “What a stickler you are for the proprieties; if it wasn’t for your beard, you would make a most excellent chaperon! Why, of course, I have thought of a home for Lotty until she shall be mine. My aunt Sheldon lives at Penaddon—that is only a few miles from Falmouth, for which we are bound, and quite as pretty; you will fill your portfolio there just as well——”

“Never mind *me*,” interrupted Litton impatiently. “Good heavens! as if anything signified except *this*. But are you sure of her getting a kind reception, a welcome?”

“Yes, quite sure,” answered the captain decisively. “Mrs. Sheldon will do anything

for me. We shall be married from her house in the orthodox manner ; it will be scarcely an elopement at all. See, here we are at Reading ; and to think that my own darling is not going to leave me, neither now nor ever !”

“O dear ! O dear ! what will poor Lily say ?” murmured Lotty, nestling, however, close to her Reginald, and evidently quite resolved to stay there.

“Can we not telegraph to her ?” inquired Litton eagerly.

“What ! and tell her where we have gone ?” cried the captain. “That would be madness indeed.”

“No, no ; I mean to relieve her mind ; to let her know that her sister is safe and well. Otherwise, they will think she has come to harm.”

“Oh, thanks, Mr. Litton,” answered Lotty gratefully ; “I should never have thought of that.”

“Litton thinks of everything,” said the captain laughing ; “he ought to be a courier to a large family travelling on the Continent. But seriously, it is an excellent thought ; and as I am a cripple, and I daresay Lotty

would find her pretty hand shake a bit under existing circumstances, you shall telegraph for us."

"Yes, but not home, Reginald. Lily will not be at home until five o'clock; and some one else might open it; and no one must tell poor papa, but Lily. She will be at the drawing-class in George Street, you know."

"Quite right. Then this is the telegram," said the captain, dictating. "*From Lotty, Birmingham (that will put them far enough off the scent), to Miss Lilian Brown, Ladies' College, George Street.—I have gone away with R. S. to his aunt's house. Your sister will be married to-morrow.*" That will prevent the telegraph clerk from taking particular notice, as he would do if he thought we were a runaway couple, and at the same time convince them that all interference will be too late. *Say all you can for her to her father. Her dear love to both of you. That you will forgive and not forget her, is her prayer. Farewell.* There is a deal more than the twenty words there, but sentiment is always expensive."

The message had been written while the

train was slackening speed, and now they had reached the platform.

Litton sprang out at once upon his mission, which he had but just time to accomplish, ere the engine began to snort again.

"Some fellows wanted to get in here while you were away," observed the captain, on his return to the carriage; "so I have got the guard to stick an *engaged* board over the window. It combines utility and truth, you see, for it keeps us private, and exactly describes the mutual relation of Lotty and myself. Don't it, Lotty?"

The captain had been mentioned in despatches for his coolness.





CHAPTER II.

THE DAUNTLESS THREE.

HERE is Penaddon?" asked Litton, when the train was once more on its way. "I mean, how far is it from Falmouth?"

"Oh, well, a good step: when I said a few miles, I rather underrated the distance. I should think it was twenty miles. It is on the south coast of Cornwall, near the Lizard."

"Then there is no railway," observed the other curiously.

"No; but it is a goodish road, though hilly; and with four horses, we shall spin along in a couple of hours."

"Is it a telegraph station?"

"Yes, there's a telegraph; but we can't go by *that*," said the captain sharply.

"No; but you can send word to your

aunt that you are coming. That you must certainly do, Selwyn, for, with an hour's stay at Plymouth for dinner, we shall not arrive at our journey's end at earliest before one in the morning; and it will, of course, be necessary to make preparations for your reception."

"Our chaperon is always right, Lotty; he shall telegraph at Swindon," said the captain comfortingly, for the news that they were to be so long on their way seemed to have come on the poor girl quite unexpectedly, and once more she had dissolved in tears. "You must tell my aunt the state of the case, Litton; ask her to take charge of Lotty, and also to secure a couple of rooms for you and me at the little inn. It's just the place for a painter—covered all over with the blossoms of a great what-you-may-call-it—a westeria (the branches of which keep it from tumbling to pieces), and looking on to the old castle."

"I hope there are not many people at Penaddon. It is not a gay place, is it, Reginald?" asked Lotty tearfully.

"Gay! No, my darling," replied the captain laughing. "My aunt Sheldon com-

plains that she is buried alive there. There is not a soul to speak to within five miles."

"I thought you said there was a castle."

"Yes; but it has no roof to it. It is a Roman ruin. Even the church has fallen to pieces, and half of it into the sea. There is another church, however, built judiciously more inland, in which marriage services are no doubt performed upon occasion."

"What will your aunt think of my coming down like this, Reggie?"

"What will papa think? What will Lily think? What will your aunt think?" mimicked the captain. "Why, my dear Lotty, you seem bent on collecting the thoughts of all the family. As for Aunt Sheldon, I promise you she will think no worse of you for this little escapade, but rather the better, for she made a runaway match of it herself—and not so very long ago neither."

Here Litton looked up quickly; his friend's eyes were fixed on Lotty, but the captain's foot came in significant contact with his own, and gave it a warning pressure.

"There is something wrong about Selwyn's

aunt," thought Walter. "Sheldon, Sheldon ! surely I have heard that name before ;" and presently he remembered where he *had* heard it. Mrs. Sheldon might have made a runaway match, but that was not the incident in her married life which occurred to his memory. He recollected her name as having appeared in the Divorce Court in connexion with a "judicial separation." She had applied for it herself, and obtained it; but still there had been circumstances, he did not remember what, but which had made an impression on him not to her advantage. She was not the sort of woman, at all events, to whose house to bring a young girl whose conduct required an advocate who should herself be above the suspicion of a stain. It was too late, however, to make any objections now, even if one could ever have been made on such a ground. Sixty miles were already between Lotty and her home; an hour and a half had elapsed which had placed her old life and her new irrevocably apart. A less time suffices to do as much for many of us. A word spoken in the heat of hate; a look given—nay, suffered to escape—in the

ardour of love ; is often a Good-bye to all our Past, and on its ruins Life begins once more.

From Swindon, "the chaperon," as the captain had christened Walter, and as Lotty herself now also termed him (for she was fast recovering from her apprehensions and anxieties), Litton telegraphed to Penaddon, and, when they reached Exeter, to Falmouth also, to order the carriage and posters to meet them at the station, that not a moment should be lost. He did not tell his companions of his having taken this latter precaution, since it would only have aroused the captain's mirth ; but, to Walter, everything that seemed likely to conduce to Lotty's comfort was of importance, and he was quite content to do her service without acknowledgment. It was he, of course, since his friend was incapacitated by reason of his honourable wounds, who procured Lotty her railway ticket, provided them with refreshments, and ordered their dinner at the inn at Plymouth. In fact, as Reginald subsequently observed, it was Walter who did the "billing," and he the "cooing" throughout that journey. The former duty

required no little adroitness to avert public attention from Lotty, for, despite all that has been done for the independence of the sex, it is still unusual for a young lady to travel with two young gentlemen, neither of whom are related to her, in an "engaged" smoking-carriage. The interest of the passengers, who had somehow or other become cognizant of this social anomaly in their midst, was greatly excited by it, and most of them, as they got out at their various destinations, would stroll up the platform to steal a look at "the dauntless three," as the captain himself styled themselves. On these occasions, not only did Walter confront the intruders with indignant countenance, and every hair in his beard bristling defiance at one side-window, but he built up on the other an eidolon, made of his own and the captain's surplus travelling gear, to obscure the view. At Plymouth, too, he preceded them to the inn, and bespoke a private room for the little party, whereby he obtained a fleeting reputation of being Lotty's husband. The waiter's powers of observation were not so keen as those of the chambermaid, who remarked at once that

Lotty wore no wedding-ring, and built up a little romance upon the circumstance; the heroine of which (as often happens in romances) was, I am sorry to say, no better than she should be.

Whether anything of this was guessed by Lotty, or that she had been made to feel in any other way the embarrassment of her position, it is certain, that so far from being invigorated by her meal, her spirits had deserted her when she entered the train again; and as dusk came on, the doubt of a welcome from Mrs. Sheldon, and the certainty of the unhappiness that she had by this time inflicted on those at home, oppressed her mind in spite of her Reginald's efforts to enliven the way.

"Stare, my darling, of course the people stare," he would explain in mitigation of her discomfort; "but it is only with admiration. They see a Crimean hero and his sister—that is, a Sister of Mercy in attendance upon him—also a young surgeon rising fast in reputation but who has sacrificed his professional prospects for the time, in order to accompany his friend to a warmer climate. It is quite an idyll of Hospital life." As

for the perturbation produced in the Brown family, the gallant captain was sublimely indifferent to it; and with respect to the reception they were likely to get at Penaddon, his knowledge of his aunt's character, and of her liking for himself, perhaps made him confident of a welcome. At all events, his stoicism only once broke down, which happened on their arrival at Falmouth, where, in addition to the carriage-and-four bespoken by Litton, they found a considerable crowd attracted by that phenomenon.

"Well, I must say you have advertised us pretty completely," was Reginald's only acknowledgment of his friend's forethought. And certainly the remarks of the bystanders were of a nature calculated to irritate an invalid. That the four horses were ordered for an elopement, the natives, it seemed, had made up their minds, and from that standpoint not even the presence of a third person could move them. They only adapted their old theory (as men will) to suit the unexpected fact, and exclaimed admiringly: "Why, if she ain't a running away with two of 'em!"

The rest of the journey was melancholy indeed; for however pleasant Dr. Johnson may have found it in his time to travel by post, he had no experience of what it is after one has already come some three hundred miles by railway; it rained unceasingly too, for the first hour, so that, though the moon was at her full, there was little to be seen from the windows of the carriage, and when it grew clear, the country was no longer picturesque. They had no more, it is true, to toil like Sisyphus up one hill-side only to descend another, but their way lay over bleak and barren moors, swept by a wind that seemed resolute to oppose their passage and in whose hiss and moan poor Lotty, though her hand was clasped in Reginald's, heard many a warning and remonstrant voice. At last there fell upon their ears that sound, which has no other like to it in nature, the roaring of an angry sea; and the captain let down the window, and bade Lotty look out. Around them and before them, for they were on a high-set promontory, spread the moonlit sea, wild and white with wrath as far as eye could reach, and beneath them a spectral ruin.

“This is Penaddon Castle, Lotty, in which, as you may observe for yourself, no county family resides at present. The light down yonder is from the Hall, which shows that hospitable preparation has been made for your reception. The scene looks a little ghastly by this light; but, to-morrow, you will own that you never saw a prettier place, nor one, I hope, in which you were so happy;” and utterly ignoring Walter’s presence, who knew not where to look, he kissed her.





CHAPTER III.

THE ARRIVAL.

THE carriage here began rapidly to descend, and passing under a gateway, and through a wilderness of shrubs and laurels, drew up before a flight of stone steps.

Litton knew, of course, that they had stopped at the front-door of the Hall, and was all anxiety to note how his companions were received. His quick eye had observed, even in that uncertain light, that the gateway was not only old, but crumbling to its fall; that the shrubbery showed no tokens of the gardener's care; and that the steps were chipped and broken. The whole place was evidently poverty-stricken; but it was not poverty—just then—that he feared upon Lotty's account. He was anxious to

see what sort of guardian Selwyn had provided for her in his aunt. The door opened, and an old man-servant appeared, and came slowly down the steps, at the top of which, with a lamp in her hand, stood a tall dark woman, gazing at them intently.

"That's my aunt," whispered the captain, jumping out, notwithstanding his game-leg, and running up to her. She did not move towards him a hairbreadth, nor even hold out her hand. Then a question and answer were, as it seemed, rapidly exchanged—and, to Walter's extreme relief, a smile broke out upon the hostess's face, and she came swiftly down to the carriage-door. She was only just in time, for poor Lotty, in an agony of grief and shame, had almost fainted away; it had seemed to her that Mrs. Sheldon was about to refuse her admittance.

"What a journey you have had, my dear, and how tired you must be!" were that lady's first words, uttered in a sweet and sympathetic, though, as it seemed to Walter, a somewhat affected tone. "However, you have reached home at last."

She held out her arms, gracefully, almost theatrically, in welcome, and Lotty fairly

threw herself into them, and burst into tears. She had not known till then how much, how very much, she stood in need of womanly countenance and succour.

“Welcome to Penaddon, my dear,” said Mrs. Sheldon, this time, as it seemed, with genuine tenderness. “And welcome to you, sir,” added she, to Walter, extending to him graciously her unoccupied hand. The *pose* of her tall, well-rounded figure was magnificent, nor did she seem at all embarrassed by the weeping girl who hung upon her shoulder.—“Who is this gentleman, Reginald? You have not introduced us,” said she, pointing to Walter.

“Oh, it’s only our courier.”

“Your *courier*!” exclaimed Mrs. Sheldon indignantly.

“Yes; our courier, our chaperon, our gooseberry-picker, our all. Is he not, Lotty?—Mr. Walter Litton.”

Even Lotty could not refrain from laughing—though, truth to say, it was in a half-hysterical way; and Mrs. Sheldon, not uninfluenced, perhaps, by Walter’s comely looks, took her nephew’s mischievous joke in high good-humour. As she led the way

from the hall into the dining-room, with Lotty on her arm, Walter could not help remarking how like aunt and nephew were; the lean fine-featured face, the bright but somewhat unsympathetic eyes, the hard yet mobile mouth, were common to both; and if the woman was not so handsome for a woman as the man was for a man, it was only because time had laid its inexorable finger on the former's charms. She was still young—that is, for a married woman—not more than five-and-thirty at the most; but there were lines about her face which spoke of trouble past and present; and now and again her mouth would shape itself, as it seemed unconsciously, into a painful smile.

Her manners were perfect, however, and the tact with which she ignored the embarrassing position in which all were placed, was worthy of Talleyrand.

“I have provided nothing, Reginald, but tea and coffee and cold chicken,” said she, pointing to the table, which was laid for supper, “because I knew that this dear girl of yours would have no relish for a heavier meal. What she wants more than anything

else are rest and quiet; and as for you two gentlemen, you will find fare more suited to your taste at the inn. You will think me very inhospitable, I fear, Mr. Litton, but——”

“I think you very wise, madam,” interrupted Walter, earnestly. “In my opinion, Selwyn and myself ought to be off to our quarters at once. We must have kept up the good people at the inn already long past their usual time.”

“Oh, bother the good people at the inn!” said the captain disdainfully, as he helped Lotty to a cup of tea.

“Yes; and that is just what you *will* do, Reginald, if you don’t get there till two o’clock in the morning,” rejoined his hostess. “Moreover, the later you arrive, the greater will be their surprise, and the more they’ll talk about the matter; and for the present, it is just as well that they should not talk about it. I have sent my own maid to bed, lest the spectacle of a young lady’s advent without so much as a hand-bag in the way of luggage, should stimulate her curiosity. The idea”—here she turned to Lotty—“of your travelling about the country, my dear,

with two portmanteaus warranted solid leather, and a couple of hat-boxes, is something too ridiculous.—You can't touch a bit, you think? Well, of course you can't, while this veteran from the wars, of whom you must have got thoroughly tired by this time, stands sentry over you in that way.—Come, sir; you are an invalid yourself, and must not keep late hours. Bid her good night, and be off to your inn.”

Reginald said his “good-bye” to Lotty, accordingly—a very decorous one, and then Walter offered his hand.

“I shall never forget your kindness, Mr. Litton,” said she softly. The words, and still more the tone, thrilled through him with a strange pain. How beautiful she looked, and yet how pitiful; far from her home and all, save one, that loved her. No; there was a second person, who did not indeed love her, because she was plighted to another, but who had devoted himself heart and soul to her interest; one whom her very sighs had troubled, and whom her tears had smitten like drops of molten lead. Would it ever be *his* future, he wondered, to be loved, as his friend was, and by such a

paragon? No, alas; for there could be no two Lotties in the world.

“Good-night, Mr. Courier.” It was his hostess who was addressing him for the second time, and with that pinched smile about her lips which is the outward sign of woman’s cynicism. “Why, you seem to take parting from your charge almost as much to heart as Reginald himself. I feel as if I were the angel commissioned to turn you both out of Paradise.”

“You *look* like the angel,” observed the captain, gallantly, “and I leave my Lotty with confidence under your fostering wings. Good-night.”

“Good-night, irreverent boy; and remember, we do not receive company to-morrow morning before eleven o’clock, at earliest.—This poor child is utterly done up,” she added in a whisper: “girls took to elopements in my time very differently.”

“Like ducklings to water, eh?” laughed the captain.

“Go away, sir; for shame!—Good-night, Mr. Courier.”

“I tell you what, Litton,” said Selwyn, when they had re-entered the carriage, and

it was moving rapidly towards the inn ;
"you've regularly 'fetched' Aunt Sheldon."

"Fetched your aunt Sheldon?"

"Yes ; made a conquest of her, man, I mean. If you had not been with us, I doubt if she would have been half as civil."

"Upon my life, Selwyn, I thought she was not going to be civil at all, when you first spoke to her on the steps. What cake did you throw to Cerberus that made things at once so pleasant? She knew you had eloped, of course?"

"Yes ; but she didn't know with whom."

"But you couldn't have explained everything in that quarter of a minute—who the young lady was, and all that?"

"Oh, she knew about Lotty well enough; but she was not certain that it *was* Lotty."

"But who else *could* it have been?" inquired Walter, aghast.

"I am sure I don't know," laughed the captain ; "nor more did she. That was her little difficulty. She would never have countenanced the affair, you see, unless she had approved of my choice for material reasons. She has a very sharp eye to the main chance—has Aunt Sheldon. By-the-

bye, I never call her aunt, nor must you hint at my being her nephew. Her little weakness is to belong to the rising generation, not to the elder one. And, indeed, there are not so many years between us, though she is scarcely in her *première jeunesse*."

Litton remained silent: he was stricken dumb by the thought of the risk that Lotty's reputation had incurred; of the chance, however small, that had existed of her finding the doors of Penaddon Hall closed against her. From one point of view, indeed, now that all had turned out right, this was satisfactory, since it showed that Mrs. Sheldon did draw the line of propriety somewhere. But what a hard and fast line it was! What misery and disgrace might have resulted from this woman's "No!" And she looked quite capable of saying "No" upon occasion, and of sticking to it. That hint about "material reasons" too, jarred upon the young painter's ear. It was evident that Lotty's expectations—the fact, that is, of her being a rich man's daughter—were known of old to Mrs. Sheldon; had probably been debated be-

tween herself and Selwyn ; and again the suspicion, he had more than once entertained that day, flashed on him, that the whole affair in which he had himself played so prominent though involuntary a part, was not the result of a momentary impulse, as it had appeared to be, but was designed by the captain from the first. And yet, that could hardly have been, unless Lotty had been a party to it ; and Walter could never, never believe *that*. It was impossible that that touching conflict between Love and Duty, of which he had been a witness, that maidenly hesitation, those regretful tears, could have been *acted* by any girl ; and above all, it was impossible—he would stake his life upon it—that this particular one could have stooped to such deception. Lotty was simplicity itself, and but that her tenderness for her lover outweighed all other considerations, the very last girl in the world to have made what the vulgar call a runaway match. How shocking, how cruel, would be the verdict passed even now upon this sweet innocent creature, for that indiscretion ; and once more he shuddered to think of what it would have been had Mrs.

Sheldon refused her countenance to her. He felt as though he could have laid down his life, if that might have shielded her from the breath of evil report, for those gracious words of parting that still rang in his tingling ears; "I shall never forget your kindness, Mr. Litton," seemed to have paid him, as it were, in advance, for any sacrifice.

Oh, great and wonderful is the power of woman's beauty over the heart of man! Old or young, married or single—for though it blooms not for ourselves, it is still passing sweet—we all alike acknowledge its sway. Man has no social gift to compare with it; for man's comeliness is not in woman's eyes what woman's comeliness is in man's. A young girl who is beautiful is a princess, to whom the knee of every male is bowed in allegiance, either openly or in secret; and those who affect to be indifferent to her, are often her most abject slaves. It is but skin deep, this beauty, we are told; but what more is majesty? It must fail and fade—that is also true, alas—but while it lasts, no matter though it be in the humblest, what potentialities—what possibilities abide

in it! Think of that, my friends, when you are about to sneer at her in whom it is fading: who feels the power she once wielded slipping from her passionate clutch, who cries with Arthur, "Authority deserts the dying king," and yet who must needs live and behold others usurp her place; think, I say, of the wretchedness of the woman who has staked all upon those fading charms, and has lost, since she has failed to win, and pity her.

"Here is the *Wheatsheaf* at last," exclaimed Selwyn, as the carriage stopped. "Did you ever see such a jolly inn?" By the adjective "jolly" the captain was wont to describe anything that was good of its kind—a jolly girl, a jolly row, a jolly lobster—but in this particular case he used it in an artistic sense.

The *Wheatsheaf* was undeniably picturesque. So entirely had the plant of which he had spoken taken possession of the whole edifice with its spreading branches, that it looked more like a house in a tree, than a dwelling overgrown with vegetation. The purple blossoms, that covered it as thickly as peaches grow on a sunny wall,

had a beautiful though weird effect in the moonlight; and so protected was the nook in which the little inn was situated that not a blossom stirred, though the wind could be heard still roaring on the moor above, almost as fiercely as the waves beat upon the neighbouring shore. The house stood with its back to the spot upon which frowned the old Roman ruin, gaunt and straggling; and to the left of it, at a slightly lower level, was dimly seen another edifice, also in decay—the church which had succumbed to the encroaching sea.

The visitors were ushered to their apartments—small and plainly furnished rooms enough, but of exquisite cleanliness—and presently came down to supper, for which they by no means manifested the disrelish which their fair companion had shown. When the table had been cleared, and the waiter dismissed to his long-wished-for bed, the two young men sat over their tobacco—the captain, as before, smoking his cigar, the painter his pipe—and discussed the day's events, with which the former expressed himself as more than satisfied.

“If my dear Lotty has a fault,” said he,

complacently, "it is indecision, and it is most fortunate that circumstances have thus decided *for* her. In a few days we shall be married; and even as it is, matters have gone too far, thank goodness, for any interference of her family with her happiness. If 'Napoleon in person,' as the war histories magnificently put it, should descend upon us—if old Brown himself should come to Penaddon, she would now become Mrs. Selwyn in despite of him.—This is very tolerable sherry to find at such an *Ultima Thule*. Let us drink the old curmudgeon's health, and a speedy reconciliation with his offspring."

"By all means, my dear Selwyn," said Walter, filling his glass. "But suppose he refuses to be reconciled, and disinherits her?"

"Let us hope better things," answered the captain.

"I do hope them, most sincerely, most warmly, my dear fellow; but one must not shut one's eyes to what may happen, merely because it is very unpleasant. It is much better to look the worst in the face—while there is yet time to avert the worst."

"I don't understand you, Litton," said the captain, speaking with the unnecessary distinctness which suggests that particular state of mind which ladies call "temper." "I am sure you do not intend to imply that there is a possibility of my retracing this step. If I were inclined to think of such a thing on my own account—to sacrifice, that is, my own happiness to this old man's will, to forego the advantage I have gained, and once more put myself in the position of a suppliant to him—I say, if I were inclined to humiliate myself to that extent (which is not to be thought of), still it is wholly out of the question that Lotty can return to her home, after what has taken place to-day, unless as my wife."

"But can you maintain her as your wife—that is, as your wife ought to be maintained, my good fellow? We are very old friends, you and I, Reginald: you cannot imagine that I have anything but your own interest, and that of your destined bride's, at heart. I know your circumstances. The question is: How are you to live?"

"That is *our* look-out—or at least mine, my good friend. And, at all events, the

question—though I grant it is a pertinent one—comes a little late.”

“That is true, Selwyn. All that I meant was, would it not be easier to conciliate your future father-in-law before you have absolutely set him at defiance? His daughter is at your aunt’s house—the match is so far countenanced by your family: is not that a vantage-ground from which you could treat with this old gentleman with a better grace, than after having utterly cast off his authority? Consider, too, with how much lighter a heart, with what an infinite increase of happiness, the girl of your choice would go to the altar, could this cloud of parental displeasure be dispelled beforehand!”

“No, Litton,” returned the other positively; “you don’t know this old fellow as I do. He is as hard as nails, where he *can* be hard; but he has sufficient common-sense, I think, to make the best of a bad job—which is the term he will no doubt apply to my becoming his son-in-law. I shall be able to make a better bargain with him when I possess that *locus standi*, and I mean to have it. Of course, the present

position is very unpleasant for us all round. People will say hard things even of yourself, to whose friendly help we are both so much indebted, for having 'aided and abetted' this young lady to leave the paternal roof. You will be like the second in a duel, who gets all the odium, and none of the glory."

"Oh, never mind *me*," said Walter impatiently. "I was thinking of somebody else. I was thinking," added he hastily, his face growing crimson as he spoke one of the few falsehoods his lips had ever uttered, "of your aunt, who will certainly come in for her share of discredit."

"Oh, never mind my aunt," returned the captain contemptuously. "Beatty Sheldon (her name is Beatrice) is not unaccustomed to the censure of society, and cares about it as little as any one I know. . She is a real good plucked one, whatever her faults, and not likely to give way to clamour. By Jove! I wish we had her at the Horse Guards, instead of some other old women I could mention."

Walter sighed, and took up his bed-candle; there was nothing more to be said,

he knew. Whatever slender hope he might have entertained of inducing his friend to make an effort, even now, to gain his intended father-in-law's consent to his marriage, and therewith some provision, however small, for Lotty's future, had utterly died away. What Selwyn had hinted, too, of Mrs. Sheldon's past was not calculated to dispel his doubts as to the suitability of that lady for a young girl's chaperon, in the present circumstances. He regretted much that his accidental companionship with the captain had made him an involuntary actor in that day's doings; but not, as he had truly said, from any apprehension of what the world might say of them or of him: he regretted it because he had seen Lotty—the brightest, fairest sight that his eyes had ever lit upon, her face the sweetest his painter's fancy had ever pictured, her voice the tenderest his ears had heard. He regretted it because he had seen Lotty, yet was forbidden by cruel Fate to love her, because she was the betrothed of his friend.



CHAPTER IV.

PENADDON.

IN spite of his long travel of the previous day, Walter Litton was up betimes on the morning after his arrival at Penaddon. Not so the captain, who, since the sight of his destined bride had been forbidden to him till eleven o'clock, thought himself justified in indulging in one of his favourite weaknesses—that of rising late. He was not a man to set a fancy value upon his time under any circumstances, nor had he much appreciation of the beauties of nature, never so charming, fresh, and inspiring as when the day is young. Litton, on the contrary, was ordinarily much impressed by them; and never had a fairer scene awaited him than that which met his

eyes when, having unfastened the door of the Wheatsheaf with his own hands (for no one in the house was yet stirring but himself), he stood in the roadway, which at a few paces from the inn was lost in the shelving sand of the sea-shore. The tiny waves were lapping softly upon it, for the storm of the previous night had spent itself, and the gulls, which it had blown about like foam, were sliding noiselessly through the sunny air. To the north and east lay the illimitable ocean; but southward, the view was interrupted by a small projecting promontory, upon which, and not on the shore, as he had imagined from his friend's description, stood the ruined church. The sea, indeed, had encroached upon it, and in a manner swallowed it up; but this had been effected by sapping the foundations of the cliff on which it had been built. The Romans, wiser in their generation than those whose devout hands had raised the church, had placed *their* edifice, half-castle, half-camp, upon much higher ground, where it still bade defiance to all assaults, even those of Time itself. The two together offered in their decay

as picturesque a spectacle as could well be imagined. A winding road, itself broken and jagged on the side towards the hungry sea, and already unsafe for wheeled conveyances, led up to the more modern ruin; but the other stood in a cornfield, approachable only by a narrow path through the standing grain. The uses of the castle, wrapped around in its mantle of ivy, and with many a leafy shrub growing from the interstices of its huge walls, in which the dust of centuries had accumulated, were wholly fled: the fosse, which had once formed its external defence, was filled with earth; the watch-tower, on which its sentinels had been posted, was unapproachable, for the steps that had led to it were fallen away; it needed a scholar even to guess at what had been the design of those massive outlines, which had once sheltered the soldiers of Cæsar. The church, on the contrary, if for fewer folk than of old, kept its uses still. Just as there are men and women, in whom, in youth, there was seen by their contemporaries little to admire above their fellows, but who, when age approaches, are clothed in reverence to the

eyes of a later generation, so was this sacred ruin—now that the voices of its preachers were silenced for ever, and the winds of heaven made music in its roofless aisles in place of any mortal choir—far more suggestive of religious thought than it had been in its palmyest time. The long-forgotten dead—those at least whom the sacrilegious sea had not devoured—still lay around it, though the grass that covered them had well-nigh lost all semblance to that “swelling turf” which marks the last resting-places of our kind; their headstones had fallen, or sunk, or disappeared, and with them, in dust and nothingness, lay the hands that out of dear remembrance might have strewn the autumn flowers on their graves; but Nature had performed this pious duty, and in less transient fashion. The golden furze lavished its rich perfume over them with every breath of air; by mossy stones, half-hidden from the eye, the violet scattered its incense, and a thousand little blossoms, yellow, blue, and red, enamelled the green pall that covered all. Even within the church, these innocent intruders had made their way, bordering

the broken slabs, beneath which lay nameless knights and squires, embracing the chancel arch with their delicate tendrils, and giving each prostrate pillar a florid capital to replace that which it had lost in its fall.

As Walter climbed the stile that led into this deserted sanctuary a partridge whirled from beneath his feet, and flew towards a neighbouring wood; his eyes mechanically followed it, and perceived through the trees the glint of a white house, which he rightly conjectured to be Penaddon Hall. In an instant, the church, the castle, and the fair scene which was on all sides spread before him, were forgotten, and his thoughts recurred to the subject from which they had won him, and from which he had been glad to be won—Lotty. He had never called her by that name, of course, but he had heard her called so, and never thought of her under any other. He was not a poet, even in feeling—as, indeed, few painters are; but he had something more than an eye for natural beauties; he had a reverent spirit. His first idea, on beholding this sacred solitude, whose silence the noisy exit of the

partridge had made even more impressive, could not have been such as would certainly have occurred to his friend Selwyn : " What a jolly place for a picnic ! " The presence of the dead would have hushed his lips. He would have thought with solemnity upon the generations of men whose bones had been buried in that lonely spot, and whose memory had died away. He would have contrasted their position, perhaps, with that of their far-off descendants, living and toiling yonder in the ships at sea, or on the earth that was to know them no more, with pity—for youth and hope were still his own. The kestrel, at all events, whom his coming had disturbed from its eyrie in the ruined castle, and which now hung reassured and motionless, above his head, would for certain have attracted his attention ; but the eye only sees what it brings with it, or, rather, the outward eye is but the deputy of our sense of seeing, and can see nothing save in the absence of its principal, the inward. And Walter's inward eye was fixed on Lotty. He could not have helped it, even though it should have cost him his life, and his thoughts did him no dishonour. How

beautiful she was, how gracious, and in what sore need of help and guidance ! These were the three aspects in which she chiefly presented herself to him. He did not resent the fact that his friend had secured her affections ; he bowed before it, as before any other harsh decree of Destiny ; but he did, without quite acknowledging it to himself, resent in his heart the complacency with which the captain took his good fortune, and the small store he apparently set by it. It was not exactly that he did not value his prize as it deserved, but that he seemed to value it for what were not its rarest and most precious attributes, but for such as were common to other girls. It was hateful, for example, to hear him talk of her expectations, and still more hateful to perceive that the difficulties of her position, and the evil consequences that might result from it to herself, were not the only, if even the chief considerations with Selwyn. He regarded them fully as much, nay, more, as they affected *him*. And if this was the case before he had married her, while those intoxicating charms were not yet his own, at the time when the Chord of Self passes from

the Harp of Life even with the most selfish, how would it be when he had become possessed and was tired of them ! And if, with satiety, poverty should also befall this man (as it was like to do), who had always been wont to fare of the best, and valued it, would not Lotty have to endure much worse than poverty—coldness, neglect, and the bitter consciousness that she had been the wilful cause of her own ruin ! Litton was hard upon his friend, no doubt, but it was because his heart was poured out like water in tenderness for this friendless girl ; nor was he selfish in his indignation. If the captain had not existed, he could still not have hoped to make Lotty his own. He had no position in the world, and no money to be called “ money ; ” that is to say, he had just enough to live upon in a very sparing and Spartan-like manner. His brush had as yet earned him little or nothing, scarce enough to pay for his canvas and the paints, with an occasional share of a model. And though so young, and really clever with his fingers, he did not believe that his genius would give him an independence for many a year to come. His parents had long been

dead ; he had been left to the care of a distant relative, who had all but declined the trust bequeathed to him, and had only let him have his way in embracing Art as a profession, because it was less trouble than to oppose him. He had been practically left to his own guidance in London for years, just as much as now that he was legally his own master. To some lads, this would have been ruin ; with most of us— notwithstanding the best of bringing-up— “good principles”—a vague name, but a very real thing—do not actuate our conduct till long after we have passed Litton’s age ; but it had not been so with him. He was no saint, indeed, but he was a man of honour in a fine sense, and a true gentleman. Old age, and womanhood, and poverty, had always exacted from him respect and pity. He had knocked about in the world (a very different thing from *being* knocked about in it, remember) without losing his tenderness of heart or honesty, though he had got rid of a good many illusions prevalent among those of his age. If Lotty had been a poor girl of humble birth, and had been free to love him, he would not have hesitated to

become a suitor for her hand. He would have thought very little of the opinions of society about that matter ; but in such circumstances as the present he would have thought a good deal of *her*, and would certainly never have persuaded her to give up home, and friends, and competence, to accept him and poverty. He had a habit, rare at any time of life with men, of thinking of others even in the affairs in which he himself was also concerned.

At this moment, however, as he walks up and down the deserted churchyard, gazing mechanically, and not as usual with a keen eye to "effects," at earth, and sea, and sky, his thoughts were mainly of his own position, present and future. How long was he doomed to live in those dreary lodgings in Beech Street, practising his art, while the short light lasted—drawing "studies" that had to be rubbed out again to make room for others, but little better, or painting likenesses of which even the hired sitters did not always express their admiration ? Upon the whole, he was afraid he would never "make much of it" in the way of his calling, though he loved it well, and was prone to

magnify it upon occasion ; never enough, probably, to have a home of his own, that he could call such, ruled by some dear help-mate and sympathizer. Jack Pelter, who lived on the floor below him, and went halves in his models, was a good fellow enough, it is true, and said " Poor devil " really as if he felt it, when Walter's picture came back from the Gallery in Pall Mall last month, rejected by the committee ; but that was not the sort of consolation for which he yearned. He did not relish the prospect of becoming in time like Jack himself, though that agreeable veteran had plenty of accepted pictures, some of which were even marked with that charming St. Andrew's cross in the catalogues ; red-nosed, hoarse-voiced Jack, given to singing ballads " amatory and bacchanalian," as the old song-books term them, late into the night, and rising in the morning with a relish for beer. Walter was no milksop, but the prospect of such a future had no charms for him, and yet it seemed the best he had to look to. He had not speculated upon these matters hitherto, being wisely content to work and wait ; but now—now that he had

had a glimpse of the what-might-have-been, if everything had been quite different, he had become sadly dissatisfied with his condition. He was not envious of the captain's good fortune, but he could not forbear contrasting it with his own. "When could *he* ever hope to possess—indeed, was it possible that the world held another like her for him or any man—such a paragon of loveliness as this young girl, whom he had seen for the first time but yesterday, but whose charms would never, while memory——"

At this point in his soliloquy Walter instinctively glanced towards the Hall, and coming down towards him through the trees he caught the flutter of a petticoat. For a moment he became rose-colour—not from motives of delicacy, for the petticoat was a long way off, but from the force and suddenness of an emotion that he could not resist. Lotty was about to join him, to take his hand, to speak with him. He felt inclined to flee to the inn, and bid the captain come—for whom, and not for him, this visit was obviously designed. The distance must have deceived her beautiful eyes, and she had taken him for her beloved

object. But it was already too late for flight; she had left the cover of the wood by this time, and was coming through the cornfield, like Ruth to Boaz, only Boaz was asleep in the Wheatsheaf: and now awhile the Roman ruin shut her from his view. What should he say, what should he do? Ought he to offer some excuse for the captain's somnolency, or to ignore it, or to say he had left him on the shore somewhere, writing her name with his walking-stick on the sand? He was prepared to take any course that would please her most; to shield, to praise—but here she came in sight again, much nearer, and he perceived, with mingled relief and chagrin, that it was not Lotty at all, but Mrs. Sheldon! She was a tall, fine woman, and of a graceful carriage, yet he felt aggrieved with himself that distance should have lent such enchantment to her that he had taken her for her lovely guest; nor had the mistake, it appeared, been reciprocal, since the lady's first words, after her "Good morning," were, "I felt sure that it was you, Mr. Litton, who had come out to enjoy this beautiful morning, and not that sluggard Reggie. I do believe that he was

secretly rejoiced last night when I forbade him to call upon his innamorata before eleven o'clock this morning. The dear fellow has made a charming choice, has he not?"

"Yes, indeed. Miss Brown is very beautiful, and, as it seems to me, has a disposition calculated to make any man happy."

"How long have you known her?"

This question rather staggered Walter, for the hours which he had passed in Lotty's company had not been estimated in his mind by their mere number at all; his life seemed to be divided into two portions of about equal length—the one during which he had not known Lotty, and the other during which he had. Brought face to face with the facts, by Mrs. Sheldon's inquiry, he felt that there was something ridiculous in replying: "Since yesterday;" so he answered evasively: "Oh, only very recently: but I have seen her during such a trying time, that I seem to know more about her than I should have learnt in months of ordinary acquaintance."

"I see," said Mrs. Sheldon dryly. "Well, I too have seen her under exceptional circumstances, and though I quite agree with

you as to her good looks, her character appears to me to be a little weak."

"You must remember, Mrs. Sheldon," answered Walter quickly, "that the circumstances are not only exceptional, but, in your case, are not altogether favourable. Up to the moment of your reception of her she was not quite certain that it would be a kind one; that she was utterly alone—nay, worse than alone—till you held out your arms to her; and had really no opportunity of showing any strength of character, even if she possessed it. Moreover, she is so devoted to your nephew, that her individuality is for the present, as it were, lost in his."

"For the present, you say, Mr. Litton: you do not think this devotion of hers, then, is likely to stand the test of matrimony?"

"Nay; indeed, I implied nothing of the kind," said Walter earnestly. "I only meant that the young lady is placed just now in a most difficult and embarrassing situation, and needs the most charitable construction to be put on her words as well as actions."

"I see you are a true knight-errant, Mr. Litton, and happy should be the lady whose colours you elect to wear upon your helm,"

answered Mrs. Sheldon with a scarce perceptible sigh. "Dear Reggie, I fear, is not quite such a Don Quixote. He would do battle, of course, for his own fair lady, but not for another's, as you have been doing. She is fortunate in having so disinterested an advocate."

Walter felt not only uncomfortable, but even abashed; he was not unconscious that he had been somewhat enthusiastic in his praise of the object of his friend's choice, and that it was no more his place to be so—nor, indeed, so much—than it was Mrs. Sheldon's. "I still, however, think that Lotty is weak," continued that lady musing; "not only born to be led rather than to lead, which is the fate of our sex, but, what is not so usual with us, well content with that dependent position. However, that is the less to be regretted, since Reggie has will enough for two. I don't think he would stand much opposition in a wife, after the honeymoon days were over; what do *you* say, Mr. Litton?"

"I think Selwyn likes to have his way, like most of us men," answered Walter.

"You are virtuous," said Mrs. Sheldon,

smiling, "for you withstand the temptation of criticising an absent friend. Well, I am his aunt, you know—though it seems rather ridiculous perhaps——"

"It seems incredible," said Walter gallantly. "When I first saw you, I thought Selwyn had been playing one of his jokes upon us in saying that he was your nephew."

"But it really is so," said Mrs. Sheldon: "my father and Reginald's were always taken for brothers, so nearly were they of an age, and yet they belonged to different generations. Well, as I was saying, I am his near relative, and privileged to speak the truth about Reggie. I think this young lady very suitable to him in many respects; but, of course, he runs a tremendous risk. I mean, of course," added she in answer to Walter's questioning look, "as to the money. I am not a mercenary person, I hope, but I know men can't live upon air."

"Nor young ladies either, I conclude," said Walter dryly.

"Well, yes; they can live upon love, which comes to the same thing, my dear Mr. Litton. There is a great deal of non-

sense talked about the expensive requirements of girls of the present day, and of how men are afraid to marry them in consequence ; but the fact is, it is the men who are most afraid of being poor. It is true that they have mixed more in the world, and therefore seen more of the inconveniences of poverty than the young people of my own sex, but, in addition to that, they are more selfish, and (if I may use the word without cant) less spiritual. Even the most foolish girl, whose happiness seems dependent upon the smiles of what is called 'Society,' has capabilities of self-sacrifice in her for the sake of him she loves, such as you men do not dream of ; nay, she would not be conscious, as all you would be—for never yet did a man give up for another's sake so much as the smoking of a cigar without patting himself on the back for it—that it *was* a sacrifice, so long as the husband continued to be what he seemed when he was her lover. If his love is not meat, drink, and clothing to her, it is all beside those three essentials ; and possessing it, she can dispense with almost everything else."

The change in Mrs. Sheldon's manner, as she thus spoke, was very remarkable : her lively, yet somewhat cynical air had wholly disappeared, and was replaced by a certain passionate earnestness. "It is possible," was Walter's involuntary thought, "that Society may have judged this woman harshly, after all ; she may herself have married one who did not continue to be the man he had seemed, or whom she discovered, perhaps, to be the lover of somebody else." His heart, always tender towards woman-kind, was moved with pity, and his face betrayed it.

"I am speaking of men and women generally, Mr. Litton," said she, in a softened tone, "for there are women as hard as nails (as Reginald would say), and men more noble than the best of women ; and in this particular case I do not doubt there will be love enough, and on the right side, to make it no hardship to dispense with luxuries. It is the vulgar meat, drink, and clothing question that is the present problem. If Brown *père* refuses to be reconciled, how are the young folks to live?"

"That is the very inquiry that I ventured to put to Selwyn last night," observed Walter gravely, "but one which he was either unable or disinclined to answer. He has his pay, of course."

"That is nothing," answered Mrs. Sheldon. "He has always looked upon it as so much pocket-money, to be spent in cigars, and sodas and brandy. The inheritance he received from his parents was to a great extent anticipated before it came to him, and he has been living on it—that is, on the principal—ever since. I should be surprised even if he could show a fair balance-sheet, and start in life to-day with anything to the good, if all his debts were paid."

"Good Heavens!" cried Litton, "this is terrible. I knew Selwyn called himself a poor man; but I thought that was considering his position in a crack cavalry regiment: poor, compared with such a man as myself, for instance. I felt that it was indiscreet of him to marry; but if what you say is true——" Walter hesitated, for he was about to say something harsh.

"If what I say is true, and it *is* true,"

said Mrs. Sheldon, "this marriage is Madness, you were about to observe. It is worse than madness—unless he has good cause to reckon upon the forgiveness of this young girl's father—it is suicide. It is upon this very matter that I came down here this morning to have a few words with you. I wanted to know, from a really trustworthy source, what chance there was of a reconciliation."

"My dear Mrs. Sheldon, I know less of that even than yourself," returned Walter, a sort of diorama of poor Lotty's married life projecting itself on his brain—a little whirl of gaiety, then debt and duns, the shifts of penury, and at last the depths of it—and filling him with indescribable distress. "I cannot, will not think that matters are quite so bad with Selwyn as you describe. If they are, how did he *himself* look forward to extricate *himself* from his difficulties, supposing this—this running-away had never happened?"

"By a lucky marriage," observed Mrs. Sheldon coolly. "Reggie has no expectations in the way of money at all; but there is a far away cousin of his, a baronet, to whose

title, although to nothing else, for he has nothing to leave, he is the heir. This man is both old and ailing, and in all probability my nephew will soon become 'Sir Reginald.' He flattered himself, and with reason, that with a handle to his name, his good looks would procure him a rich wife, when it should become absolutely necessary to him to redeem his fortunes by matrimony. With such personal advantages, aided by the glitter of his Crimean medal, he could hardly, indeed, have failed. But now, if he has overrated the strength of Brown *père's* affection for his offspring, he has done for himself altogether."

"He has done for somebody else also, it appears to me," said Walter bitterly.

Mrs. Sheldon shrugged her plump shoulders and threw out her little hands: "That goes without saying, Mr. Litton: man and wife are one; such, at least, is the view of the law."

"And I suppose they must now be man and wife," observed Walter mournfully. There was nothing of selfishness in his thought, only commiseration for what seemed the wretchedness of Lotty's future;

but it was with a sarcastic smile that his companion answered : “The alternative would be even worse, under the circumstances, my good sir, for the ‘somebody else,’ for whom you express so disinterested a solicitude. Matters have gone too far, in the eyes of the world, to admit of retreat, even if Reginald would listen to such a proposition. The girl is of age, and even if she were not, the law is not so paternal as it is (perhaps fortunately) supposed to be by young ladies and their would-be swains. If she were a ward in Chancery, then, indeed, even Reginald’s will would have to give way for once, and I myself might get into serious trouble for giving my countenance—though, you will do me the justice to own, I had not the opportunity of refusing it—to yesterday’s escapade. You must never run away with a ward in Chancery, remember—unless she is somebody else’s wife ;” and Mrs. Sheldon broke into a light musical laugh, that startled Walter not a little.

“You are shocked,” said she, “at my want of gravity ; but what would you have ? The mischief is done, and there is

nothing left but to make the best of it. If you will take my advice, you will not put Reginald in a huff by useless expostulation upon a matter which is, after all, his own concern; nor shall I make Lotty sad by allusion to her blank prospects. If evil is to come, it will come soon enough, and let us at least spare her the misery of expecting it. She will be up by this time, and looking for her hostess, so I must say *au revoir*."

"One moment," said Walter earnestly. "May I ask how long—I mean, how soon will the marriage take place?"

"Well, doubtless as soon as the law will permit it. In a case of special licence—you will think I have these things at my finger-ends, but I was married myself," here she gaily touched her wedding-ring, "under these very circumstances—the period of residence is of no consequence. I hope we may succeed in preventing your being bored to death at Penaddon for the very short time that will be necessary to get the document from Doctors' Commons."

"I thought of going back home—that is, to town," said Walter hesitatingly. "I only came down to look after Selwyn, and

now, of course, I shall be no longer necessary to him."

"My dear Mr. Litton, you are more necessary to him than ever," replied his companion gravely; "your presence, indeed, is absolutely indispensable at the marriage itself."

"How so?" inquired Walter, with amazement.

"Why, you will act, of course, as the deputy of Brown *père*. You will have to give Lotty away."

Mrs. Sheldon had turned upon her heel, and was half over the churchyard stile (exhibiting a very charming foot and ankle) before he could recall his senses, scattered by this bombshell of a reply. Give Lotty away! So inhuman a command had never been laid upon him since his first schoolmaster had bid him fetch the stick which was designed to be the instrument of his own correction.





CHAPTER V.

MRS. SHELDON'S REVENGE.

IN Walter's return to the Wheat-sheaf he found the captain just descended from his room, and looking very handsome, but haggard. He had not slept well, he said, for his "confounded arm" had troubled him. At this spectacle his companion's heart was instantly moved to pity, and smote him sore for its late severe judgment upon that hero. He had taken this man to task for selfishness, yet here he was maimed, or, at all events, disabled, in the performance of his duty: it could not have been a pleasant thing, however glorious, to have crossed and recrossed that Crimean valley, with the cannon-balls hurtling over it, and the grave gaping before every stride of his horse.

“My dear fellow, can I not do something to ease the pain? A cold-water bandage, a——”

“No, no; you might as well blow upon it,” answered the captain impatiently. “But I tell you *what*, if you’ll sit down, while the breakfast is getting ready, and write an application for the Special Licence—that will be really doing me a service. I’ll sign it, of course, but writing is as hard a job for me just now as when I first learnt pothooks and hangers.”

This was another stick to be fetched for the schoolmaster; but Walter obeyed with a smothered sigh; and the missive was despatched at once by messenger, in order to catch the mid-day mail from Falmouth.

In spite of his wounds and his love, the captain made a much better breakfast than Litton, though he had been out for hours in the sea-breeze.

“Gad,” said the former, without notice of this circumstance, “this Penaddon air is first-rate for the appetite; and now that that licence is sent for, and one has nothing on one’s mind, one feels inclined to eat for ever.”

Litton thought within himself, that that poor girl up at the Hall, for the first time separated from home and friends, and having for her sole companion a lady so well acquainted with the law of the land as respected clandestine marriages, might not be so fortunate in having "nothing on her mind;" but he kept that conviction to himself.

It was near eleven o'clock before the meal was concluded; and the captain, putting an immense cigar in his mouth, expressed his conviction that they were "due up yonder," and led the way to his aunt's residence by the footpath through the corn.

"Queer old church that," said he, with a nod in the direction of the ruin; "and a very favourite place for the 'cheap-trippers' to bring their grub to. So was the castle here—it's no more a castle, by-the-bye, than it's a lunatic asylum, but that's what they call it—until Farmer Yates stopped their little larks by putting up 'Spring-guns and man-traps set on these premises.' Did you ever *see* a spring-gun or a man-trap? It would probably cost a man a thousand pounds in damages, or twenty years' transportation, who should set up any such

engine; and yet people believe in their existence."

"That is the case, perhaps, with some other dreadful penalties, that seem a little disproportioned to the offence," observed Litton thoughtfully.

"How so? You don't mean that one can't punish those poacher fellows?" answered the matter-of-fact captain.

"No, no," said the other, smiling; "I was referring to certain theological menaces, the effect of which may be very wholesome, like that of the board yonder, but which one ventures to hope may a little exceed the reality."

"Oh, I believe all *them*," cried the captain resolutely. "None of your free-thinking for me. I'm not straitlaced in morals and that; but when it comes to religion, that is quite a different thing. I'm a church-and-king man, I am."

"What is that?" inquired his companion dryly.

"Well, a man that swears by the Thirty-nine Articles, and respects the law, sir—the game-laws, for instance. It is true I have neither read the one nor the other,

but I take 'em on trust. That's faith, my good sir; in which I am afraid you artist gentlemen are rather deficient."

"My dear Selwyn, it is my opinion that Nature intended you for the pulpit—to beat 'the drum ecclesiastic,' instead of the kettledrum."

"As it happens, we don't beat kettledrums, nor even possess them, though we do belong to the Heavy Brigade," said the captain, with a little touch of temper, the usual accompaniment of theological discussion. "It is a pity to see a clever fellow like you talking of matters you don't understand. Here's something which you do. Look at that fine view yonder, through the trees: the church and the sea, and the ships, and that little beggar with the red cap, with his shrimp-net! I hope my aunt has given Lotty some shrimps for breakfast. By jingo, there they are!"

The two ladies were walking in the wall-garden of the Hall, which, standing on a lower level than the spot where the young men stood, was completely commanded by it. Though the grounds about the house were, as we have hinted, as ill kept as the

mansion was dilapidated, this did not affect their natural beauty, which was very great. The walls of the garden were crumbling to the touch of time, but moss and lichen covered them; the fruit-trees had escaped from the rusty nails that had once confined them, but their laden branches looked not less fair as they hung heavily down, and even trailed upon the ground; and though it might be difficult to tell flower from weed, so rankly did they grow together, the garden-plots blazed with colour.

This wildered Eden was bordered by a swift and brawling stream, and beside it paced Lotty and her hostess, apparently in earnest talk, and quite unconscious of the admiring eyes that were fixed upon them. The outlook to seaward had been well worthy of the captain's encomiums, but Walter thought this home-picture even still more charming, and one fair figure in the foreground worth them both.

"How very, very beautiful!" cried he in a rapture.

"It's a pretty spot, ain't it?" assented the captain, "though one can't say much for the garden. The fact is, my aunt is as

poor as Job, though she has not his patience (if her husband's testimony is to be relied on), and the whole place is tumbling to pieces. She ought to have taken a cottage—but I suppose she knows her own business best. She is clever enough and to spare. I'll lay my life—I can tell it by the bend of her neck—that she is pumping poor Lotty at this moment; 'eliciting,' as the police reports have it, every scrap of information concerning the Great Self-made—that's what I call old Brown—and his belongings. I'm obliged to have all *my* wits about me, I can tell you, when she takes to cross-examining *me*. Not that I've anything particular to be ashamed of, more than my neighbours; but if one has a little secret, one likes to keep it, and that woman is resolute to find it out. Scandal is the breath of life to her, so you may imagine what a difficulty of breathing she labours under at Penaddon."

"But why does she live there, then?" was Walter's not unnatural inquiry.

"Well, you see, she has had a quarrel with Society, and it is better to live at a place where there is nobody to visit one, than

where there are plenty of fine folks about who wont. I shall have to talk to her a bit this morning about family matters—‘urgent private affairs,’ as we say in the Crimea—and must leave you and Lotty to get on together as you can. Young women that are ‘bespoken’ are not, I know, very lively companions; but she looks upon you, I’m sure, already as an old friend. It is true ‘the friend of the husband,’” added the captain, laughing, “is rather a dangerous acquaintance; but if I can’t trust ‘our chaperon,’ there is no faith to be placed in man.”

Litton laughed, as he was expected to do, but the colour came into his cheek in spite of himself: it was not the blush of shame, for his nature was loyal to the core, and yet he was conscious that he was not so completely qualified for the post assigned to him as the captain imagined. No chaperon’s heart goes pit-a-pat as her charge draws nigh; no chaperon’s speech begins to fail her as she discourses (on the proprieties, for instance) to the object of her solicitude; yet both these sensations were experienced by Walter Litton within the next five minutes,

at the expiration of which he found himself walking with Lotty by the little river, followed slowly, and at a considerable interval, by Selwyn and his aunt. The latter lady had saluted Walter as though she had not met him since the previous evening, which astonished him not a little, since it took for granted, what, indeed, happened to be the fact, that he had not mentioned the interview to the captain. Had she read that reticence in his face? Or did she deem that their conversation in the churchyard had been of too confidential a kind for him to have alluded to? Or was it really true, as his friend had laughingly suggested to him, that this "grass widow," as he called her, had fallen in love with him, and wished to establish clandestine relations between them? Litton was "human" enough, and not much less of a coxcomb, perhaps, than the rest of our sex, but circumstances alter feelings as well as cases, and just now, walking by the side of Lotty, he did not like Mrs. Sheldon the better for her prudence.

The rims of Lotty's eyes were a little red, but that did not detract from her charms,

in the opinion of her present companion : for that she had been weeping, only proved the tenderness of her heart. She had been somewhat overtired with her journey, she said, in answer to his inquiries, but was well enough in health. As to her spirits, she could not help being anxious about those she had left at home. That was only natural, Walter allowed, yet expressed his confident expectation that, in a week or two, she would, as the captain's bride, be as cherished a member of her family as ever.

"Nay, Mr. Litton, you do not know my father," answered she tearfully : "I am afraid I shall have offended him past forgiveness. Reginald does not like to look upon the dark side of things, I know, far less to talk of it ; but papa will be very, very angry, I know ; and Lily, oh, so sad!"

Here she hung her pretty head, and a sob was heard which wrung Walter's heart.

"But it is better to talk about it," said he softly, "than to let a woe unuttered prey upon your mind. I cannot fancy that any one who knows you—far less who loves you, as your father must do—can very long hold out against your pleading. Selwyn is a

gentleman, well born, well bred, a soldier who has distinguished himself in action, one any man might be proud to call his son-in-law. It is not as though you had married, I do not say beneath you—for you could never have stooped to that—but a mere nobody—like myself, for instance.”

Perhaps it was agreeable to him to put the case, even supposititiously, in this way, or perhaps he fondly expected that his companion would remonstrate against this lowly estimation of his own position (which in reality he by no means thought so ill of), but Lotty took no notice of this personal illustration whatever.

“No, no,” sighed she; “it is not that; but my father has set his heart upon his daughters making what are called ‘good matches;’ he wishes us to marry rich men. And now that I have chosen Reginald, it will be all the worse for poor dear Lily. Papa will choose for her himself some odious creature who has money, and she will be made miserable all through me.”

“Nay, it is surely wrong to harass yourself with the fear of so remote a contingency,” urged Walter; “for having lost one daughter

—or dreaming for the present that he has lost her—your father will be slow to part with the other ; he will keep her at home to comfort him, and be won through her, in the end, to a reconciliation with you and yours. It must be so, I feel confident, and especially” (here Litton gave a little bow) “ if your sister Lilian is like yourself.”

The bow was quite thrown away, indeed it is doubtful whether Lotty observed it, but to his last words she replied with simplicity : “ Oh, Lilian is worth a thousand of me. She is wise, and dutiful, and good!—oh, so good, Mr. Litton ! And I know she is breaking her heart for me, though I am so unworthy of her love ;” and she put up her little hands before her face and sobbed anew.

“ If all the rest you have told me,” said Walter earnestly, “ is not more true than *that*—I mean that you are unworthy of her love—I must be excused for not sharing your fears. Sooner or later, all must needs be well with you, since justice rules the world. The law allows you, being of full age, to make your own choice in marriage ; and in forbidding you to do so, your father

is himself disobedient to the law. You have immediate happiness in prospect; do not dim its brightness by apprehensions that time will show are groundless."

"I will try, indeed I will try, Mr. Litton, to look on the bright side of things," sighed poor Lotty, and, like a chidden child, she dried her eyes, and strove to smile.

"That's a brave girl," said Walter approvingly; "and here comes one to reward you for your courage, and who will know how to comfort you better than I."

That was the last effort which Litton made to intrude his own personality, where, it must be acknowledged, it had no rightful place; at the same time, it was very innocently meant; he did love her, with all his heart, but with such a flame, that if his heart had been of glass, it would have been seen to burn with purity: there was no noxious exhalations of envy or hatred of his friend, nor did a thought of rivalry mingle with it. He was content to be a brother to Lotty, if she would have regarded him in that light; but even that, as it seemed, was not to be. She was so wrapped up in others, in her Reginald, and in her own belongings,

that she had shown herself scarcely conscious of his existence ; and with that acknowledgment of his services of the previous day, as it seemed, he must be content for evermore. Her look, as she spoke it, was still mirrored in his mind ; her words were stereotyped there, beautiful to read and read again, like some sacred text, all gilt and colour, which a mother hangs on the wall of her child's chamber, to meet his eyes at morn and eve ; but there were to be no more such looks nor words. Why should there be ! He had been overpaid already for what he had done ; and besides, there would have been danger in such thanks. This he felt to be the case, not so much from any consciousness of latent longings for that forbidden fruit, as from his indifference to other dainties. Mrs. Sheldon, with whom he was thrown *tête-à-tête*, as a matter of course, from that hour, until he left Penaddon, was more than gracious to him, but without kindling a spark of gratitude ; the position was expressed by the formula of that great stumbling-block to the female intellect, the Rule of Three : as Mr. Litton's delicate attentions were to Lotty, so were those of Mrs. Sheldon to Mr. Litton.

There were doubtless good points about the character of his hostess, but she was not so much above the average of her sex as to take this insensibility in good part: that a young man of two-and-twenty, no fool, indeed, but of a frank and simple nature, should have such opportunities of a little flirtation with her, and neglect them; that she should put forth all her strength to make him captive, and yet fail, was a circumstance that she exceedingly resented. She knew something of his own art, and went out sketching with him to the most picturesque and romance-inspiring spots, in vain; she sang to him to the music of the wave, yet proved herself no siren; she told him her own touching history—so much of it, that is, as it suited her to tell him—without evoking a single spark of sympathy more than the barest civility demanded. It was long since she had made a conquest, and that made her all the more eager to bring this young gentleman to her feet: her weapons, she flattered herself, were as formidable as ever, and she had certainly not forgotten how to use them. Yet he was as invulnerable as Achilles. Why she wanted to wound him,

she probably did not know herself, nor what she would have done with the poor wretch, had she succeeded. A man's intentions in such cases, even if not honourable, are generally definite; a male "flirt," though such a thing may exist, is a *lusus naturæ*. Mrs. Sheldon was simply obeying an instinct of nature; and just as a sportsman who delights in shooting, though the contents of the game-bag are not to be his own, is annoyed at missing, so was she annoyed, and even ashamed, at her ill success.

It is not with the mistress of Penaddon Hall that this story has mainly to do, else it would not be uninteresting to note the rapidity with which the barometer of this lady's feelings, with respect to the young painter, rose and fell: within those few days, the arrow performed a complete circle. It pointed to "set fair" as long as it could, and then something gave way (it was her patience), and it fell to "very stormy."

On the day when the stick which poor Walter had had to fetch was used upon his own back—when the licence arrived, that is, and he had "given" Lotty "away" to Reginald, and the happy pair had departed

for the honeymoon, and the fly that was to take himself to the railway stood at the Hall door, Mrs. Sheldon made him a farewell present: not a piece of plate, but a piece of her mind.

"I will not say I am glad you are going, Mr. Litton," said she, as she held out her hand, "yet I honestly confess it seems to me that you have been here long enough, for your own happiness and for that of another."

Walter could scarcely believe his ears. He had had a dim notion for some time that this lady had been endeavouring to get up a flirtation with him, to which, perhaps, he had not responded very gallantly; but he had taken Reginald's statement, that she had fallen in love with him, mostly as a joke, for which, indeed, it was half intended; this sudden suggestion, therefore, made apparently in all seriousness, that he had fallen a victim to her charms, staggered him not a little. To reply that he was sorry to have made her unhappy, was a flight of coxcombry beyond his powers, yet it really seemed as if that was expected of him.

"Believe me, my dear Mrs. Sheldon,"

stammered he, "I shall never forget these days at Penaddon, and all that, thanks to you, I have enjoyed during my visit."

"Endeavour rather to forget them," answered she gravely, "and especially what you have *missed*. I know your secret, and I will keep it, Mr. Litton; but I cannot but express a sense of relief that Lotty has left my roof and with her *husband*."

With that Parthian shaft, she withdrew into her sitting-room, closing the door behind her, and leaving him standing in the hall, transfixed! He had had what is called "a classical education," and the *spretæ injuria formæ* of the poet recurred to his memory with a blinding flash. If he had despised the charms of his hostess, she had certainly taken her revenge.

How wretched was that weary drive over the moor to Falmouth, which, unhappily too, he could not but contrast with what it must have been to the pair who had preceded him! How desolate was the sea, how barren the land, to *his* eyes, how bright and glorious to theirs! For them was love and the fruition of it! for him too was love—

he confessed it; how could he ignore it, when another had read it written on his heart, through all the armour of duty, friendship, honour, which he had put on in vain, and with which he had striven to hide it from himself! For him was love, alas, and loneliness. The spring of his life was broken, for hope was gone. If fame had been that day within his reach, he would not have cared to put forth his hand to grasp it. Oh, evil hour, in which he had consented to accompany his friend to the fair south, and tend him! Penaddon was hateful to him. He had many a record of it in his sketch-book: its silver sands, its quiet bay, its time-hallowed ruins by the shore; and he would burn them all. Yet what would that avail, since the recollection of them—every spot she had admired, every scene in which she had set foot—would be ever present to his eyes! As to continuing in the neighbourhood, concluding there what he had once looked forward to as his “holiday,” that was not to be thought of. He would return to town and Work—would work his fingers off, and his brains away, would kill himself

with work, if possible ; for the grave itself seemed welcome to him !

Poor Walter ! It is not at all times that Heaven is kind, for refusing to lift the curtain of our future ; we often groan and writhe at the prospect of misfortunes which do not come, although they seem so near that the very shadow of their approach overwhelms us with its gloom ; and even the wretchedness that is present, and makes us in love with death, and seems beyond relief, is not seldom mitigated, nay, dissipated, by an unexpected ray coming from an unlooked-for place—as though dawn should break at midnight and from the West—and making our murky sky a cloudless blue.





CHAPTER VI.

IN BEECH STREET.

IF there is any panacea for wretchedness in this woeful world, it is work, and work only. If all the suicides, and the motives that led to them, could be tabulated, it is certain that the want of work—incapacity for it, or inability to obtain it—would be found, in nine cases out of ten, under the column “Cause;” even the Hopeless—those who work without prospect of reward in any form—do not commonly leave the sunshine for “the sunless land” while hand or brain can still find employment. The uttermost misery of human life is probably expressed by that vulgar phrase which we read every day applied to some starving wretch, in our newspapers, with careless eyes, or at most

with a shrug of our shoulders—"out of work." Walter Litton was so far wise that he knew this. Left to himself, while still a lad, in the Great Babylon, amid temptations against which no common virtue is of avail, he had not succumbed to them, mainly because he had set himself to work; while others of his age, though under task-masters, had shirked it. His nature was wholesome, and he kept it so, by this simple means: in an atmosphere of vice and pollution, he carried about with him this purifier, this antidote, this disinfectant. He had faith, it is true, for his mind was reverent, and he had had a good mother; but faith without work would not have saved him. Among other marvellous virtues which employment confers upon him who has his heart in it, is a respect for others who likewise toil. The honest worker, no matter in what guild he is a craftsman, feels no contempt for those who labour in a humbler sphere. It is the idler, useless to others, and a burden to himself, who seeks to justify his own indolence by despising these. We have seen a State fall to pieces mainly from its

own rottenness, wherein to work was held to be shameful and a badge of servitude; and the condition of the mere pleasure-seeker is like unto it. At the least stroke of misfortune, he collapses; though, while prosperity lasts, he sits above the thunder like a god, and smiles contemptuously upon the busy hands that supply his needs.

To those who are acquainted with artist-life, there is nothing more characteristic than the behaviour of a painter to his paid sitter; in this are found the extremes of rudeness and refinement, of selfishness and consideration, of coarseness and chivalry. When the model happens to be of the female sex, the case becomes all the more significant. It is the opinion of the outer world that "the young persons" who sit for the Imogens that adorn the walls of our picture-galleries, or typify Innocence with her dove, or Faith with her palm-branch, do not afford what is called "improving" society for the young artist, nor the young artist for them. The whole Royal Academy, on the other hand, are zealous to affirm that the pursuit of art is far too elevating to permit its votaries to stoop to ignoble flirta-

tion ; nay, that not only good taste, but a certain reverence for their profession, compels decorum—*noblesse oblige*—towards these handmaidens. To differ from a R.A. upon any question concerning his own calling, is (as is well known) an intolerable impertinence ; and I will only venture to affirm that, in the days when one frequented studios, I remarked that honest young gentlemen of the brush used a brusqueness of manner towards their Imogen which suggested some distrust of their own virtue. It is easier, I fancy (though, singularly enough, it does not require so strong a flight of fancy), to conceive a lay-figure to be a young lady, than to conceive a young lady to be a lay-figure ; and in order to accomplish this latter feat, we must not be too polite.

Mr. Jack Pelter, for example, who, as we have mentioned, was wont to go halves in his models of both sexes with his fellow-lodger, Mr. Litton, was exceedingly gruff and tyrannous with the “Imogens” — a system which he had at first adopted from prudential motives ; it had kept him heart-whole while that organ had been young and

impressionable ; and now that it was tough and leathery, and his soul defied enchantment, he was gruff from habit.

“ You’re a precious deal too civil, young fellow,” he would growl to Litton, who, to a woman, and a poor one, could not be otherwise than the very pink of politeness ; “ and some day or another you’ll repent it.”

But no entanglement of the kind his mentor had suggested had happened to Litton, and it was less likely to happen now than ever. He worked even more diligently than before since his return from Penaddon ; but the recollection of her he had met and lost there could not be thereby effaced ; his heart was so occupied with Lotty, that is, with fears and hopes upon her account— “ Would her father forgive her ? and if not, Would her husband still be kind ? ”—that the sacred place in it, in which a man keeps the idols he worships without stain, had no room for the image of another woman.

Otherwise, parents and guardians, *all* one’s female relatives, and men of the world generally (who know everything, and yet believe in nothing), would have thought it a dangerous thing for him to be painting

Nellie Neale for two hours *per diem* in an attitude of supplication. What made it *more* dangerous for him, they would have thought (and also for *her*, if such young persons were worth thinking of at all), was, that Miss Ellen Neale was not a professional model. She was the daughter of "a cobbler who lived"—or at least laboured—"in a stall" at the corner of a neighbouring street, and had never before "sat" to an artist. Litton, who was far from being a dandy, had business relations with her father; and while bidding him send for a pair of boots that wanted mending, had seen this pretty little creature bring him his midday meal from home, wrapped neatly up in a basket; from which circumstance he had christened her on the spot Red Riding-hood, and she had learned in time to call him grand-mamma. The honest young fellow perhaps adopted this latter title to give him a reverence in her eyes, which his years and looks might well have failed to extort from her; and if that blood-relationship had actually existed between them, his behaviour towards her could not have been more exemplary. Mr. Jack Pelter had not been

in town when this young lady's professional services had been secured, nor was he now in need of an "Imogen," pecuniary necessities, consequent upon certain extravagances of the vacation, having caused him to confine himself to the less sublimated but more remunerative occupation of portrait-painting; so Walter had his present model to himself. *He* also had been taking portraits since his return from Penaddon; and though not disposed of at a very high figure, these had furnished him with funds for more than his needs, as well as provided him with this excellent counterfeit presentment of Philippa, Edward's queen, in the act of beseeching that monarch to spare the lives of the citizens of Calais.

"A very uncommon subject, truly," said Jack Pelter, in his usual character of cynical, but friendly critic. "But why not strike out something perfectly original, my dear fellow—such as the Finding of Harold's Body after Hastings?"

"Because I mean to show," returned the other with equal gravity, "how a great artist can appropriate a story, however often pictured, and make it his own on canvas,

just as Shakspeare has done in literature."

So every afternoon, from two until the wintry dusk closed in, Philippa of Hainault knelt upon a soft cushion of Utrecht velvet (or something like it), on the second floor of No. 99, Beech Street, and held up prayerful hands to the stern Edward, who thus replied to her supplications: "The head a shade more to the right—the hands a little lower—just the faintest smile, as if you saw the ruffian was yielding. Thank you; that's beautiful" (which it *was*). "If you are getting to feel stiff or tired, Red Riding-hood, be sure to mention it."

"I do just a little, grandmamma."

"Then get up, and trot about."

This happened many times during each sitting, if Queen Philippa's position could be called so; and on one occasion, just after one of these trotings about, and when Nellie had fallen on her knees again, and was about to supplicate for the poor citizens with renewed vigour, there was a knock at the door, and in walked Captain Reginald Selwyn. The house in Beech Street did not

boast of any groom of the chambers ; when the front-door bell was rung, a diminutive maid-of-all-work answered it, and directed the ringer to the first or second floor, according as Mr. John Pelter or his friend was the object of his visit ; neither of them had many callers, but Litton had far fewer than Pelter ; the time had not yet come, if it was ever to do so, when critics should drop in, who would have a word to say, under the head of Art Gossip, about the forthcoming picture by Mr. W. Litton ; and still less for patrons or picture-dealers to show their critical faces, with a view of bespeaking some immortal work before it left the easel. So Walter expected no company on that day, but least of all a visit from Reginald Selwyn. Many months had elapsed since the marriage of which he had himself been the aider and abettor, but not a line had the captain written to him from the day they had parted at Penaddon Hall ; nor could his wounded arm have been an excuse for so long a silence, for there he stood in the door-way, with all his limbs like other people's, except that they looked more shapely and strong than most, which indeed

they were. His face had lost its pallor, but also, or so it seemed to Walter's attentive eyes, much of its gaiety and brightness.

"Why, Litton, my good fellow, you must have thought me dead, as well as 'done for.' Matri——"

Here his glance lit upon Philippa, Edward's queen, who had risen hastily from her cushion, and was regarding the new-comer with much embarrassment. It was the first time that her sittings had been intruded upon by any one, save Mr. Pelter, whom she did not "mind," and looked upon as another "grandmamma."

"I think we will finish for to-day, Miss Neale," said Walter quickly, "as our time is nearly up, and this is an old friend whom I have not seen for long."

"I hope the young lady will not go on my account," said the captain gallantly.

But Nellie had already exchanged her high-peaked head-gear for the bonnet of everyday life, and thrown over her mediæval robes her warm winter cloak; and while Walter was once more explaining that the sitting had been nearly over in any case, she slipped through the door, which Selwyn

held open for her, and with a hurried bow, in acknowledgment of that civility, was gone.

"By Jove!" said the captain gravely, "this is what you artists call the pursuit of your profession, is it? I don't wonder that portrait-painting is so popular?"

"My dear Selwyn, you don't suppose that that poor girl comes here to have her portrait taken, do you?"

"No; by jingo! I don't," answered the captain sententiously.

"I mean," continued Walter, with resolute sedateness, "that though my patrons are not unhappily in the highest position in society, Miss Neale is not one of them. She is a good honest girl, who helps her father by sitting to me as a model for a few shillings an hour."

"O, indeed! she is a model, is she?" returned the captain, still very incredulously. "A model of what?"

"Oh, of anything, according to the subject, you know."

Nothing would have been easier, or more convincing, one would have thought, than to have shown his friend the picture of

Philippa — which was already advanced towards completion—in corroboration of this statement; but Walter's first act, on seeing the captain, had been to throw a large piece of linen over the work in question, and rapidly ply his brush on another piece of canvas, which, as it so happened, did not represent the female face divine at all.

"Why, that's the old church at Penaddon, surely," exclaimed Selwyn, whose attention was easily diverted from one subject to another. "It's just as well you should have sketched it when you did, for my aunt writes me that these stormy seas have eaten into it worse than ever this winter, so that there is hardly any of it left."

"Well, never mind the church," said Walter; "I want to hear of your own affairs. How are *you*, old fellow, and—and —Mrs. Selwyn?"

He felt that he was blushing, hesitating, and making a mess of his kind inquiries generally, for the idea had struck him it was just possible that Mrs. Sheldon might have written to her nephew about something else beside the encroachments of the

sea—might, out of spite and malice, have communicated to him that suspicion about himself, which had overwhelmed him with such confusion on his departure from Penaddon.

“Oh, I’m well enough, and Lotty too,” said the captain—“that is, in health; but that old hunk, her father, will not have a word to say to us, and what is of much more consequence, will not help us with so much as a sixpenny-piece. We are having a very rough time of it, I can tell you.”

“I am very, very sorry to hear it,” said Walter earnestly, his mind reverting to the fate his apprehensions had prefigured for Lotty, exposed to the keen bite of poverty, and shorn of all the comforts that had by use become necessities to her—a beautiful and tender flower fading and failing for want of light and air.

“Yes, it is an ugly story, Litton, and likely to be uglier. It was a risky thing, that marriage of mine, of course, but I never dreamt that things would have gone so deuced hard with me. My sick-leave cannot last for ever, and yet I can’t go back to my regiment as a married man.

We couldn't *live*—no, not even in barracks—and that's the short and long of it."

"But surely, my dear friend, other people who are captains in the army——"

"Yes, yes; but they don't owe a couple of thousand pounds to start with," broke in the other impatiently. "It's no use crying over spilt milk, but the fact is I have made a precious mess of it. There will be nothing for it but to sell my commission, and then to cut and run, before the Jews can get hold of me. Talk about the miseries of human life; I don't believe there's any one of them to compare with the want of ready money!"

"How very, very sorry I am," repeated Walter.

"Yes; I am sure you are; but I wish I could make old Brown sorry. Lilian does her best to move him, she says, and perhaps she does; but no doubt there is a great temptation to her to keep us out of the old man's favour. He has a hundred thousand pounds to leave, if he has a penny; and that is a much better thing than a hundred thousand pounds divided by *two*, you see; for there is no doubt

about it that Lotty was to have been Lily's co-heiress."

"But surely your sister-in-law would never be actuated by such a base motive? Your wife, I know, has the greatest affection for her, and complete confidence in her goodness."

"So she had in *mine*, for that matter," observed the captain with a sneer; "yet, I suppose, I was not much better than other people. I say nothing against Lilian; only it does seem strange that she can't do anything for us with the old fellow. He has *some* natural affection, I suppose, in spite of his treatment of Lotty, and a woman can always bring a man round, if she will take the trouble."

"How old is your father-in-law?" inquired Walter.

"Oh, there's no chance of his popping off the hooks, if you mean *that*. He's no chicken, it is true; but he's one of those City fogies who are as tough as gutta-percha, and take a deal of care of themselves into the bargain. I daresay, if anything was to happen to him—I am sure I wish him in Heaven—Lilian would do

something for us, though not one-tenth of what my wife expects of her; but while the grass is growing that is to cover *his* grave, the steed will starve, my good fellow."

"I was not alluding to his death," observed Walter thoughtfully; "but I have noticed, even in my guardian of late, and much more in other old men, that, with increasing age, the character softens."

"The brain may do so," answered the captain contemptuously, "but not—at least, I'll answer for it in old Brown's case—the disposition. He's as hard as nails. If I could get the commander-in-chief, or some tremendous swell, to intercede for us with him, instead of his own daughter, something might be done, I believe, for he's a snob to the backbone. He would grovel on all-fours, I understand, before a peer of the realm."

"Then he ought to be at least tolerably civil to the heir-presumptive of a baronetcy."

"Well, ridiculous as it seems, Litton, that is the one hope I have of circumventing the old fellow. If my first-cousin was to die—and I hear he is in a very ticklish state—I

honestly believe that my self-made father-in-law would not show himself so utterly inexorable to me as Sir Reginald; it is not in his British nature. But there! when do one's relatives ever die, or do anything else you want of them, when they promise it? No, no; my cousin will come round, if it is but to spite me, and I shall starve to death as plain Reginald Selwyn."

"When you speak of starving, my dear Reginald, you are, of course, merely using a very violent metaphor," said Walter with anxiety.

"I don't know about a metaphor," answered the captain; "but this half-sovereign," and he took one out of his waistcoat pocket, and held it between his finger and thumb, "is the very last of all the Mohicans; and when that's gone, I shall not know where to turn for another. Lilian has helped her sister a little out of her private funds; but, as though the old wretch suspected that she might be giving us assistance, her father keeps her very ill supplied."

Throughout this interview the captain had been smoking a very excellent cigar,

which could not have cost less than eightpence in Regent Street; but this was doubtless either one of the large stock he had in hand when he became a Benedict, or he was smoking it—in which view it might be considered economical—as North American Indians smoke their pipes, in order to allay the pangs of hunger.

“I regret indeed,” said Walter, blushing exceedingly as his manner was when embarrassed, “that you should have allowed yourself to come to such straits without applying to an old friend. I have been taking portraits wholesale, and have quite a balance at my banker’s. Come, let me lend you fifty pounds;” and he pulled out his cheque-book.

“You are the best fellow out,” said the captain; “but it is a deuced unpleasant thing to borrow of one’s friends. Now what is Lilian’s is Lotty’s, or ought to be so; so in that case I feel no compunctions——”

“Then you should feel them still less with me,” interrupted Walter, thrusting the cheque into his hand. “You would borrow my umbrella if it rained, I suppose, and I had no occasion to go out; then why not

my money when I don't want it? What a fuss is made in the world about borrowing or lending a few pounds! You may ask for a shilling to pay your cab-fare, if you have no change, but gold is a sacred commodity, it appears."

"It's a commodity that it is precious inconvenient to be without, old fellow," said the captain, putting the cheque in his empty purse. "I won't give you an I.O.U., for that would be waste paper, but I will pay you when I can, upon my honour. You don't suppose, I hope, that I came here to-day, Litton, with any expectation of becoming your debtor?"

"Good heavens, Selwyn, how you talk," exclaimed Walter; "of course I suppose nothing of the kind. I took it for granted that you came to see me, as one of your oldest friends; when *I* come to see you, it will not be concluded, I hope, that I come as a creditor?"

"Don't be savage with me, my good Litton," returned the captain gravely. "I daresay I don't express myself very prettily, but the fact is I'm soured. The harrow of poverty takes all the skin off the man that

is under it, and makes him tender to touch. He thinks everybody is crediting him with the basest motives, and in denying them—*qui s'excuse s'accuse*—he seems to others to acknowledge their existence. I know I'm savage with everybody, and quite as ready to pick a quarrel as a friend's pocket."

Walter did not reply; he pitied Selwyn, but he pitied Lotty infinitely more. What a life must she be leading, destitute of material comforts, and exposed to the outbreaks of her husband's temper, "soured," as he confessed himself to be, by disappointment, and "savage with everybody!" Was it possible that he could give any assistance to her, beside money? he wondered. If he were to see her, perhaps she could suggest something—and his heart did yearn to see her.

"There's another thing," continued Selwyn bitterly, "which poverty—'the test of virtue,' 'the tonic bitters of life,' as fools have called it—does for me—it makes one as proud as Lucifer. Nothing, for example, would seem more natural to you than that I should say: 'Well, our home is a very humble one at present; but that will make

no difference to you, old friend, so come and see us.' I know it would make no difference to you, and yet I don't want to see you there."

"Is it worse than this?" asked Walter, laughing, and looking round his own apartment, which was of no palatial proportions, and presented such a scene of picturesque disorder—and I am afraid I must add, of dirt—as is only seen in studios.

"Well, no; our London lodgings are not so bare as my barrack-rooms, perhaps, to which you have been always welcome; but they are not such lodgings as are fit for my wife to receive company in."

"You are the best judge of that," said Walter quietly. This was an unexpected blow, yet even while he staggered under it, he felt that the punishment was wholesome; his devotion to Mrs. Selwyn was perfectly innocent; but for his own happiness he felt that it was better that that "yearning" of his to see her should not be gratified. He could not have resisted the temptation to do so had it been offered, but neither would he fight against his friend's denial.

"You shall come and see Sir Reginald

and his lady," said the captain, laughing, "and be invited, as their friend, to dine with the great Brown. That old villain has got some particular Madeira, the thought of which makes me still more impatient of my position, since every day by which our reconciliation is postponed (for he drinks it daily) makes an inroad on the bin.—How hard you must have been working lately, Litton!" Here the captain began to look about him for the first time, his whole attention having been previously occupied in twirling and flattening his moustaches, a sure sign that he had been ill at ease. "I wonder if I've had any of *your* pictures from old Levi: he always gives *half* in pictures, and I've got quite a gallery of them, ancient and modern. Why, what's this?" and he threw aside the linen cloth that hung over the portrait of Philippa, Edward's queen.

"Oh, that's unfinished," said Walter hastily, "and I hate my pictures to be looked at till they are finished."

"Oh, nonsense, man, you don't mind *me*," said the captain, persisting as usual in the indulgence of his own whim. "Why,

this is the best picture of the lot, to my taste. So this is Miss Neale, is it? Well, I confess I should never have recognised her but for the costume. This is a much fairer girl—more like the style of Lotty.”

“Do you think so?” said Walter. His tone was careless, but his face was very pale. “It is only a sketch, a portion of a larger picture. Perhaps you would like to sit for her husband, King Edward, in chain-armour; I will give you half-a-crown an hour, and your beer.”

“You should have made that offer before you lent me these fifty pounds,” laughed the captain, tapping his pocket. “Well, good-bye, old fellow, for the present; and if I have any good news, you may be sure you will be the first to hear it.” They parted very cordially, but Walter did not accompany his friend downstairs. He stood gazing at the uncovered picture, and muttering scornfully to himself: “I need not have been so apprehensive,” ran his thoughts; “his indifference makes him blind. ‘More like the style of Lotty,’ he said. Perhaps she pleads with him like this, sometimes—upon her knees. Poor Lotty!”



CHAPTER VII.

MR. JOHN PELTER AS MENTOR.



It is astonishing how the profession of Love—that is, the love of man for woman, or *vice versâ*—being of such endless variety, should be described by poets and philosophers as of only two or three kinds, or even “lumped” (as Pope, for instance, lumps it) into one. Monomania, fever, atrophy, have each their name and place in medical science; but all these diseases, and many others, are in psychology spoken of as one, as though no difference existed between them. There is, it is true, an admitted peculiarity in the case of what is called a Platonic attachment; but this term is seldom used, except in irony, and I am inclined to think that those who so make use of it are right. I

have rarely known a Platonic attachment where the lady, at least, would not have married the gentleman if she could. That love itself is Protean in its outward shape, is (in spite of the poets) now allowed. We admit that the sweetness and light of the world do not change (as Byron, for instance, would have us believe) to gall and darkness, to Corydon because Phyllis rejects him; or that the sun seems to shine for him by night, and roses to bloom for him in February, if she accepts him. He is pleased and gratified, of course; more so doubtless than if he had won five shillings at skittles; yet not more, perhaps, than if he had won five pounds. I am speaking of a Corydon of the humbler classes, of course, when I mention so vulgar a game and such small amounts; but if Corydon was a born gentleman, and, in the practice of his profession, the Turf, should pull off, say, fifty thousand pounds on a double event, that would probably give him almost as much pleasure as being accepted by Phyllis.

“Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his
glowing hands;
Every moment lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands;”

but if such luck as we have supposed should happen to a gentleman sportsman, don't you think the glass of Time would run itself into just as golden sands as if Love held it? I must confess I do. Of course there are some young persons who, being denied by their Beloved Objects, immediately go and hang themselves; but these are fortunately exceptional cases, which do not materially affect the census returns. A more numerous class plunge into dissipation; a remedy which, though (besides other serious objections to it) it may kill as well as cure, has undoubtedly been found to be efficacious. Others have the good fortune to see some other nice young woman, the next day, or the next month, after the disappointment, and get over it by marrying her. All of us are agreed that there are many ways of meeting a misfortune of this kind, as well as many ways of expressing our bliss upon receiving an answer from Phyllis in the affirmative; and yet almost all are resolute to affirm that the love of Corydon for Phyllis is the same all the world over. This is a great error. Without any trespass upon that dangerous ground of Platonic

attachment, a man may adore a woman with honesty and honour, whom it is utterly out of the question that he should marry, from whom it is impossible that he should receive any greater favours than a clasp of the hand or a kind word. The type is not common, because the Phyllises who are capable of inspiring such a passion are few; and such disinterested Corydons are few: but it exists. Such a love, for example, would have been entertained by Warrington for Laura, if he had met her in the first instance as the wife of Pendennis. There would have been no harm in such an attachment, nor thought of harm; but it could not have been expressed by the terms respect, regard, or friendship; nay, it would comprehend a devotion for Mrs. P. not entertained, perhaps, even by Mr. Arthur Pendennis himself.

It was some absorbing feeling of this sort which filled Walter Litton's soul with respect to Lotty; in some cases, it might not have been a disadvantageous one—indeed, an unselfish passion of this sort is often most advantageous—but Walter was too young for such a gracious burden, not,

as he imagined, because life lay before him lone and barren for so many years, but because he lacked the discipline of life; he could not free himself from its influence at pleasure, and though he could forget it—that is, the smart of it—in occupation, it pervaded even the work of his hands. It is certain that his present picture profited by this. Love, “the more ideal artist he than all,” had given a spirituality to the expression of Philippa, Edward’s queen, which Miss Nellie Neale, and perhaps even Lotty herself, did not possess; it was, in fact, a glorified likeness of the latter, a likeness that might easily escape the eyes of such as were but slightly acquainted with her, or had not seen her under circumstances calculated to evoke her deeper feelings, but which would strike most forcibly those who knew her best. Without, of course, recognising the source of his friend’s inspiration, or even being aware of what it was, Mr. John Pelter perceived that this portrait was far in advance of anything that the young fellow had yet achieved; and he told him so, after his peculiar fashion, puffing at his pipe, and regarding this *chef-d’œuvre* with

his huge flax-covered head sloped to the critical angle.

"My dear Watty," said he, "I don't wish to flatter you, but that's the most like a human creature of anything that you have yet turned out."

"I am glad to hear you say so," returned Walter, well pleased with this moderate praise, which indeed, in Jack Pelter's mouth, implied far beyond what it expressed. A huge good-natured giant was Jack, who knew much more of his profession, though he seldom used the slang of it, than many a man who can discourse of "his art" by the hour, and leave his hearers in the most inextricable entanglement; a man, it was true, who cared little to be known by the world at large, so long as he was known by the dealers, and was supplied by them with the funds sufficient for his not extravagant needs, but who worked as honestly, after his lights, as Raphael, whose cartoons he believed to be the most valuable bequest that any living being has left to posterity.

"Yes, Watty, this is a great advance upon your 'Drunken Organ-grinders'—I beg your pardon, your 'Brigands Carous-

ing.' The young woman's foot here is out of drawing, and I daresay the other would be, if it wasn't covered by her train; but the picture is good, sir—it's good." And Mr. John Pelter stepped back from it slowly, upsetting "Penaddon Church" as he did so, and once more regarded it with fixed attention. "You must not lump any King Edwards with a lot of this kind," continued Jack, "or else you'll spoil it."

"But Queen Philippa must be kneeling to *somebody*," urged Walter.

"Then don't let her be Queen Philippa at all. That high head-dress may very well be taken for a fool's cap; and if you write 'Forfeits' under it, the whole thing will explain itself. 'Who is the owner of *this* pretty thing? Let her kneel in one corner, dance in another,' and so on. There; don't be affronted; I'm only joking, so far as regards the title. The girl must kneel alone, that's certain. Chuck your Pinnock's England overboard, cut away the rest of the canvas, and call her 'Supplication.'"

"Upon my life, Jack, I think that a good idea."

"Of course it is. Send out for something

to drink its health in. 'O for a draught of vintage full of the warm South,' something delicate and tasty, and redolent of the subject. Jenny!" roared he from the top of the stairs, "fetch a pot of stout."

Over this refreshment they discoursed the future of the immortal work.

"That must not go to the Gallery, or any of those places, Watty," said Jack, whom the generous liquor had rendered still more eulogistic. "You must have a shy with it at the big shop."

"I am sick of trying there," answered Walter despondently.

"Sick of trying! Why, you have not got a grey hair on your head! If you were *my* age" (Jack was about thirty), "you might talk of blighted hopes."

"But you have been hung, and in good places too; and yet I have heard you say that you had just as soon your pictures went to the Gallery, or straight to Pall Mall——"

"Well, well; that's because I wanted the money," interrupted the other, with irritation. "Don't you mind about me. If I said I don't care about fame, perhaps I was

wrong, or perhaps I lied. Your case, at all events, is different. Follow my advice, Watty, my boy, and send 'Supplication' to run its chance with the committee. They do *sometimes* take a thing on its own merits. Remember how Campbell was hung last year, through MacCollop, R.A., taking him for a fellow-countryman. 'Death by misadventure,' as somebody said of it, when all the newspapers were down upon his daub."

"You are very encouraging," said Walter, smiling; "but nevertheless I will try the big shop."

In spite of Walter's pretended irony, there was great encouragement in Pelter's recommendation. Jack was not above the weaknesses of his calling, and could abuse a brother artist—who was successful—as roundly as any one. But he was singularly just and honest in the main. His tenderness for his young friend was great. It is not too much to say that his hopes for his success were higher than for his own; for he was one of that increasing class who are not ambitious either of fame or fortune. As long as he could earn a competence he was satisfied with the result of his own

labours; and a competence with him meant something very modest indeed. It is not a good sign in our social life that so many men, even in comparative youth, are becoming indifferent to great gains and high distinction: if such sentiments were universal, the production of anything really great in any line of life would be rendered impossible; but it is only the natural rebound from that excessive struggle to get a head and shoulders above their fellows which distinguished the last generation, not altogether to its credit. In that contest, Friendship too often went to the wall, and every generous impulse was trodden under foot, in order that Self should rise supreme. There is no better excuse for indolence than the spectacle of successful Diligence standing all alone upon its pedestal, without friend or lover, a mark not only for envy, but for deserved contempt; and Mr. John Pelter had seen, or fancied he had seen, not a few eminent gentlemen of his own profession in that isolated position. By toiling and scraping, and denying himself all the delights of youth, there is no man so great a fool, he would argue, but that he can

acquire for himself a heap of money—only to find that, by long disuse, he has lost the faculty of enjoyment. There was no great fear of this in Mr. Pelter's individual case: his capacity for pleasure was so considerable, that some of it would certainly have remained with him under the most disadvantageous circumstances; but it suited him to adopt this theory, which, it is fair to say, he acted up to in a very conscientious manner. He worked well, never "scamping" a square inch of that which he set his brush to do, but never overworked himself; he took his time over his canvas, and his ease, and did not trouble himself much with speculations upon the verdict of posterity. The verdict of posterity, he would philosophically explain over his pipe and pot, was, in its relation to art, merely the judgment of a set of people removed by one or more degrees farther from the great lights of antiquity than we ourselves, and who were therefore less qualified to give an opinion. All that was best and greatest lay in the past; and though the present might not be a great age—indeed, he had very little belief in its being so—yet it was

only reasonable, by the argument of analogy, to suppose it would be superior to the future. Why then make such a fuss about posterity? The fact was, that in Mr. Pelter's eyes posterity was but the next generation of picture dealers. For his own works he had no ambition; no desire for fame, and very little even for profit; but for those of his friend he allowed himself some hopes. He liked the young fellow dearly, and had a genuine admiration for his talents, which he wished to see made use of to the best advantage. Perhaps he had a secret conviction that he had missed his mark in the world, and was solicitous that Walter should have better fortune.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE ACADEMY CIRCULAR.



ONCE knew a very clever but paradoxical man who was wont to explain that, upon the whole, the British House of Peers were created from personal merit: his line of argument I forget, and, indeed, though urged with great ingenuity, it was somewhat difficult to follow even when in process; but I am nearly sure that genuine conviction animated it, until he became a peer himself; after which, modesty, or perhaps some innate sense of humour (in which I had always thought him deficient), sealed his lips upon that subject. There is a natural and wholesome desire on the part of the public to believe such things. I very much question whether nine people in ten do not

entertain the delusion that a silk gown (for example) is an honour conferred upon barristers for eminence in their profession : and I am quite sure that it would shock them to hear, that for every Victoria Cross that is given for valour, half a dozen are applied for in vain. Folks in the country even believe that pictures are accepted or rejected in the Royal Academy every year solely upon their own merits ; that the Hanging Committee know nothing about them ; that they are sent in without name or address, and simply with a motto—like the poems that compete for the Newdigate or the Chancellor's medal—and are adjudicated upon without any personal reference to the artists. And yet these good people would be quite insulted if you inquired if they believed in the Millennium.

Walter Litton knew very few R.A.'s, and none who were upon the Hanging Committee of that year. No member of it was inveigled into the second floor in Beech Street, and persuaded to cast his eye upon "Supplication," in order that when he saw it again upon a certain momentous occasion recognition might follow. Jack Pelter would have

done him that good turn—for he was one of those who will do for a friend what “wild horses” would not have compelled him to do for himself—but Walter declined the offer.

“My dear Jack,” said he, “you are most kind; but I would rather the thing stood on its own hook.”

“I want it to hang on the Line,” was Jack’s curt rejoinder.

“Well, I hope it will, or, at all events, somewhere. It may be very foolish of me, and very sanguine, but I have great confidence——”

“In the committee?” broke in Pelter. “Then you must be very foolish and very sanguine indeed.”

“No; in the merits of the picture.”

“Gad, how I wish I was your age!” sighed Jack. “Do you think it will be bought for the nation?”

“I don’t wish it to be bought at all.”

“Oh, I see; you want to keep it for your diploma picture.”

But though Jack was thus cynical with his friend, he had a high opinion of the excellence of this particular piece of work,

over which Walter expended a prodigious amount of time and pains. His usual habit was to tire of his productions. He was by no means a careless worker, but ere he had finished one picture his mind had begun to be busy with its successor. He had always deemed his last work the best, of course, but his last would be nothing to that which was to follow it; the germs of which *chef-d'œuvre* were already sprouting in his brain. But with "Supplication" the case was different. Every detail was wrought up to the highest pitch of perfection of which he was capable, and he was never tired of touching and retouching them; he did not retouch the face, either because he was satisfied with it, or because he distrusted his ability to effect improvement, but he would fix his eyes upon it for long intervals with the intensity of an intending buyer. Then he would look up with a sigh, and busy himself with the embroidery of Queen Philippa's robe, or with the colour of the cushion upon which she knelt. He would even do this when his model was in the room, forgetful of her presence, and of the money per hour it cost him; and upon one

or two occasions he noticed that she also had her fits of abstraction. Then it struck him that her face had grown paler of late, and her large eyes less lustrous, and his tender heart reproached him for his indifference.

"We have been working very hard at this picture, have we not, Red Riding-hood?" said he kindly. "Don't you think you would be the better for a little holiday?"

"Not so far as I am concerned, sir. I am not at all tired."

"You look so," returned he, regarding her in really quite a paternal way; "very fagged and out of sorts. Are you quite sure you are well?"

"Yes, sir; I am well enough."

"But you may not be a good judge of that. I shall go round this afternoon, and speak to your father about you, little one."

"Oh pray, sir, don't speak to him!" returned she with sudden vehemence. "Indeed, indeed, there is nothing the matter with me—nothing, at least, to speak of. There is no need for any holiday. Besides, father has bills to pay, which were not

settled at Christmas, and it would vex him if I fell out of work just now."

"Oh, I daresay we can manage about the bills. You have been one, two, three, four months eternally kneeling upon that cushion; and so far as this picture is concerned, I can get on very well by myself now. Yes, yes; you must have a holiday."

"As you please, sir," answered Nelly humbly; "that is, so far as the sittings are concerned. Indeed, I have felt that I have been picking your pocket for the last six weeks."

"Picking my pocket, Red Riding-hood! Why, how was that?"

"Well, sir, I have seen that I was of little or no use. You don't know how absent and thoughtful you have become; I might just as well have been at home as in your studio, for all the good I have been to you for this last hour, for instance. And then the picture isn't like me, not a bit. It was at first, perhaps, just a little; but you have been thinking of somebody else all along, and been painting her instead of me."

The colour rose to the very roots of

Walter's hair, but he answered laughingly :
"And has that offended you, Red Riding-hood, all along?"

"No, sir; indeed, I didn't notice it at first. But it seems wrong that I should come here and take your money, when you could get on just as well without me."

"And that's what makes you look so pale and sorrowful, is it? You must certainly have a very tender conscience. However, let me tell you for your comfort, Red Riding-hood, that I can *not* get on without you. I have got used to you as a sitter, and when folks have come to the age of your grandmamma they are averse to change. Perhaps you have sat long enough for Philippa; but you have plenty of expressions beside that pleading one, which you have worn so long, that I do believe it has made you downright miserable. Mr. Pelter has recommended me to take the game of Forfeits for a subject, which will require you to be full of fun; and after a month or two of that I shall expect you to be in tearing spirits."

When Walter and his friend were smoking their pipes that evening, the former spoke of

his model's altered looks, and of the talk he had had with her. "I could make nothing of it, except that she must really have taken it to heart that the picture is not a portrait. I wish you would take her for a bit, Jack, and put her in good spirits."

"I am doing a veteran in boots and a beard," said Pelter dryly; "and I should recommend you to paint a veteran for your next picture—Miss Nellie's great aunt, for instance."

"Nonsense! I am really serious in asking your opinion, for I am sure the girl is out of sorts about something; not ill, I think, but wretched in her mind. What the deuce can be the matter with her?"

"I am afraid Red Riding-hood's grand-mamma is turning out to be a wolf, in spite of herself, Walter."

"I don't understand you, Pelter."

"Don't you? It's a very old story, my good fellow. I don't for a moment imagine you want to devour her, mind, though she would be a dainty morsel for some people. But I have a suspicion she wants to be eaten."

“ You don’t mean to say that the girl has fallen in love with me ? ”

“ I am not sure ; but there is no accounting for tastes, and she may have done so. I am glad for her sake, at all events, that you are a gentleman—and not a man of honour.”

“ I hope not, indeed, in the sense you mean,” answered Walter, reddening. “ But it seems to me your view is a very cox-combical one.”

“ It would be if I had suggested she had fallen in love with *me*,” returned Jack. “ But that she has fallen in love with somebody is certain : downcast eyes, pale cheeks, and sighs, are all ‘ signs,’ as old Burton calls them in his *Anatomy*. You will find them there under the head of ‘ Love a Cause.’ Perhaps she is enamoured of your Apollo, which is as large as life, and very like : such things have happened in the case of statues, so why not with paintings ? If this be so, and since nobody will buy it, you had better give it to her.”

“ I think what you suggest is quite as likely as that she should have fallen in love with *me*,” said Walter gravely ; “ but she is

certainly very unhappy. After what you have said, I would send her away to-morrow, but that she says her father is so hard up."

"You are too emotional," said Mr. Pelter; "or, in other words, a soft-hearted young fool. Also, I wish you would drink a little fairer. Please to ring for another jug of beer."

As a matter of fact, however, not only had Mr. John Pelter had his full share of the beer, but he had no reason to plume himself upon hardness of heart. His general views of his fellow-creatures, like those of most Bohemians, were cynical, but in each particular case he showed himself no philosopher. Indeed, he could not bear with equanimity the misfortunes of total strangers to him, much less of his friends. He was opposed to beggars upon principle, but often and often would he take some poor pinched creature into his studio, under pretence of his own artistic needs, and then dismiss him warmed and filled. To his personal friends he was devoted, and when Litton's picture was in due time sent into the big shop on approval, Jack was far more anxious about its fate than Walter himself.

Indeed, Walter exhibited an indifference in the matter which, considering what the other knew of his character and antecedents, was inexplicable to his friend. He showed despondency, sitting almost idle for whole days alone—for he had, for the present, dispensed with the services of Nellie Neale—but not those symptoms of solicitude for the success of his great work with which Jack was so well acquainted in other cases. The cause of this was curious, yet by no means unknown in the profession to which he belonged. *He missed his picture.* This is peculiarly an artist's grievance. The novelist can both have his cake and eat it: his book—the writing of which has given him so many hours of pleasure, and with the characters whereof, even though he may have failed in making them real to others, he has been living for months in as close a relationship as with those of his household—remains to him after it is written. But when the painter has sold his picture, it is gone for ever. The majority of his class may be glad enough to get rid of it, if the price is satisfactory: Pelter was so, and Litton himself had been so hitherto. But

now and then a picture becomes to its creator like a child to its father. The wrench of parting with it, however mitigated by recompense, is as severe as that which Romance attributes to the Arab when parting with his horse. He has seen it grow under his hand in unexpected strength and beauty out of nothing; it has been his companion for many solitary hours, whispering to him hopes of fortune and of fame, which, however realized, must needs fall short of its suggestions; till, though so ineffably ideal, it has become something lifelike. It is sometimes pregnant with Association: reminding him who drew it of some much-loved scene that can never be beheld again, as on that bygone day in which he saw it first; or, perchance, of some dear one whom death has taken. The heart has more tentacles than the eight-armed demon of the sea, wherewith, like it, it lays hold of things animate or inanimate with dogged clutch; "it clings, it clings;" and neither Siren's voice nor Reason's can make it loose its hold. Walter missed his picture, though the face it mirrored haunted him like a ghost; and would have been well

content to hear it was in that academical Vault—the bourn from which all pictures *do* return to their disconsolate owners—so that he might go at once and claim it. It would be found there doubtless, as other works of his had been, but meanwhile he grudged its absence. He had another picture on his easel, but his heart was not in that as it had been in its predecessor; he was equally painstaking, equally conscientious with it, and yet he did not need Jack's ominous silence—his omission to point out its defects—to convince him that it was a failure. At times, so errant was his mind, that he saw both pictures—their lines and hues mingled together, like a dissolving view. Under such circumstances to paint was useless, and he gave himself up to his own morbid thoughts.

Where was Lotty now? He had seen nothing of Selwyn for months, nor heard of him, and so far, as he bitterly reflected, that was a good sign. In prosperity, the captain was more likely to forget his friends than if he had need of them. On the other hand, since he owed him money, he might be ashamed to come; they might be very, very poor.

He had seen in the paper that Selwyn had sold out of the army, and now he must needs be living on his capital, if his creditors had left him any to live upon. And when that was spent, what could they do then? To what wretchedness might not that innocent, angelic creature be reduced by this time—and thanks to *him*! It had not been Walter's *fault*, of course, but he reproached himself for not having combated the captain's arguments in the railway carriage in favour of their elopement, nay, with having been in the railway carriage at all, since, but for his presence, Lotty would not have taken that first fatal step of leaving home. At another time he would be full of pity for them both. What right had he to judge the motives of his friend, since he knew for certain only the strength of his temptation, which he acknowledged to himself—his own present feelings, indeed, were an evidence of the fact—was overwhelming. It was harsh in the captain not to have let him visit them in their trouble, since he ought to have known that their poverty would have only exacted sympathy and respect, and to what catastrophes might not

this false pride impel him ! Surely, surely, he would never permit Lotty to want, through disinclination to apply a second time to his own scanty purse ! At this idea—the picture of that fair young face, white and wan with physical woe—he would start up from his chair, and pace the room like a madman. The very postman's knock, though letters seldom came for the lonely young fellow, would suggest all sorts of hideous apprehensions ; there might be news that Reginald was in prison—he had himself said it was more than probable—and Lotty alone and starving. One day, when there had been a letter for the first floor, he heard Pelter's loud voice upon the carpetless stairs, exclaiming : " Oh, this is for Mr. Litton," and then his friend's heavy tread coming upstairs three steps at a time. Jack knew something, though by no means all, of his solicitude upon the young couple's account, and sympathized with it. He stood now at the open door, with a very grave face, and in a solemn tone exclaimed : " Walter, here is a letter for you. I have opened it by mistake."

" A letter," said Walter : his hand shook

as he held it out for the missive. "No bad news, I hope, of—of Selwyn?"

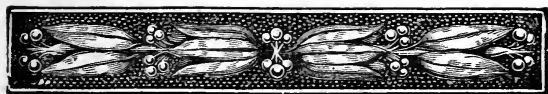
"No; it's only a circular—a circular from the Academy, my lad," cried Jack with a joyous whoop. "It's to tell you that Wednesday is Varnishing Day, and therefore that your 'Supplication' has been accepted."

Then his two great hands seized Walter's, and wrung them in expressive silence.

"I am not a good one at congratulatory speeches, Watty, old fellow, but I am downright glad."

O blessed time of Youth and Friendship, O happy hand-clasps, only second to the first kiss of Love; what glories must be beyond the gates of the grave that shall recompense us for your loss!





CHAPTER IX.

A FIRST BID.



IF the painter, as we have shown, is in one respect at a disadvantage, as compared with the author, in another he is much more fortunate. "The Exhibition," as the annual show at the Royal Academy, notwithstanding its many rivals of the same name, is still called, is an institution that in literature has no parallel, and which is of the greatest possible benefit to the young artist. Of course true merit will make its way in the end in any calling; but a man may write the best book in the world, and even publish it (though that is not so easy to one unknown and poor), and yet be some considerable time before he can persuade the world to read it; but when a painting has once got admittance within

the Academy walls, all has been done for it in the way of introduction to the public that it can possibly need. The art critics may praise it, or let it alone; it may be hung well or ill, and a great grievance is made (by those who have not much confidence in their own work) in the latter case; we have even known a young gentleman, on Varnishing Day, so dissatisfied with the position of his picture, that he cut it out of its frame; but still, so long as it is not hung with its face to the wall, all that have eyes can see it. He that has painted it, if it be worthy, has got his foot set on the first round of the ladder of Fame. There is nothing, I repeat, to be compared with this, in the way of opportunity, in the sister art of literature. I may have my essay, my story, my poem in the leading magazine, for instance, but people do not take up the leading magazine in such numbers as crowd the great rooms in Piccadilly, nor does the "taking it up" always involve the reading of it. Whereas folks come to the picture gallery to see the pictures, and especially, in many cases, to have the credit of discovering some embryo genius, who has no influence with the

papers, and of whom they may say, at the spring dinner-parties : “ By-the-bye, did you happen to see that exquisite little thing called ‘ Supplication ’ in the right-hand corner of Room 5 ? ” And if you didn’t, you will not escape hearing about it.

So young Walter Litton had really cause to congratulate himself in that the gallery gods had relaxed their brows, and resolved to hang, instead of banishing him, as before. Had such a stroke of good fortune happened to him in the previous year, it would have rejoiced him exceedingly : he would have felt it to be the very accolade of his knighthood, a most refreshing spray from the fountain of all honour. But now matters were very different with him ; Fame had ceased to be his deity ; and the news that his friend had brought him was hailed rather because it was not that other news which he had feared to hear, than upon its own account—as a relief rather than a triumph. Still he was glad that his friend was glad, and that the event had justified his praise of his handiwork. It was a pleasure to him, if not the great joy he had expected, to make one of that fortunate band on Varnishing Day,

and to feel his foot on the ladder—not of Fame, but of the steps that it was necessary for him to use, to give the last touches to “Supplication,” *née* “Philippa.” It was hung a long way up, but yet he was not dissatisfied. He did not fear its being overlooked—or, rather, underlooked: not from vanity, though he had a good opinion of its merits, but simply because it so riveted his own eyes that he could not understand its escaping those of others. He was almost glad that his friend had sent nothing to “the Big Shop” that year, so that he could contemplate it quite alone. He had acquaintances, of course, equally fortunate with himself, who passed their friendly comments upon it; but they gave him little pleasure. He cared for no approbation, no notice of it, save from one person, who in all probability would never see it. It was to the last degree improbable that Mrs. Selwyn should visit the Royal Academy; Reginald, he knew, cared nothing for art, and besides had no shillings to throw away on such an expedition. Upon the whole, he hardly knew whether he was better satisfied that the picture had been accepted, than he

would have been to have had it back again in his own chamber, to contemplate it at his leisure. For he did not, as many young painters do, haunt the spot where it hung ; not from any fear of adverse criticism or neglect, but because remarks upon it of any sort would, he felt, have been painful to him. The subject was sacred to him, in a sense that does not often affect young gentlemen painters—nor old ones, for that matter—who “go in” for sacred subjects.

Whether “Supplication” was really a good picture or not, this present writer, who is, he confesses, one of those ignorant Philistines who only knows what he likes, must be excused from positively asserting. “If you want to know whether a diamond is a good one,” said an eminent R.A. in my hearing, “you go to a jeweller for his opinion ; and if you want to know whether a painting is good or bad, you must go to a painter for the information : to buy one upon your own responsibility, is an act of madness ; to pass your opinion upon it, is an impertinence.” I am therefore silent (except that I venture to express a wish that Literature stood upon equally lofty

ground with Art) upon the merits of "Supplication." The newspapers were silent also, greatly to Mr. John Pelter's disgust, with the exception of a few lines of praise that he himself got inserted in the *Art Critic*, and the inspiration of which Walter immediately detected, though he did not say so, for his friend's sake. It annoyed honest Jack immensely that there seemed so little chance of seeing that red star in the corner of Litton's picture which has lit up the despondent gloom of so many a young painter, and made his darkness dawn. After the first month, most pictures that are fated to sell are sold; and more than a month had passed since early May. Some weeks after this date, notwithstanding, there came a letter to Walter one evening—when the two friends were together as usual—from the Academy official, to ask what price he had put upon his picture; and this, after a moment's hesitation, he placed in Pelter's hand.

"Well, better late than never, my lad," cried the latter joyfully. "This is as it should be. I had begun to think that all the world was blind."

"They have not seen with your kind eyes, Jack," said the other gravely; "that is all."

"Well, they see now, and that's something," answered Pelter impatiently. "But why does this bungling fellow write to *you*, instead of telling the man or the woman—for I'll take two to one it's a woman? There's true religion in that picture, Walter, I don't mind telling you, now that you have found a purchaser. It's some woman with good eyes in her head, and a good heart, and I hope a good balance at her banker's, who wants it. Well, I say, why didn't the fellow tell her your price at once?"

"Because he didn't know it," said Walter quietly.

"Not know it! Why, didn't you fix it at a hundred pounds yourself?"

"No, Jack; that was your price, not mine. I didn't mention any price; indeed, as I told you long ago, I don't think I care to sell it."

"Not sell it! Then why the deuce did you paint it?"

To paint a picture without the intention of getting rid of it, and as soon as you

could, was in Jack's eyes the act of a lunatic.

"I painted it for my pleasure."

"Oh, did you, begad? Then you are nothing better than an amateur." The epithet had the same force with Mr. Pelter as though he had called a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England a ranter. "Of course you can do as you please, if you are rich enough. You can paint a dozen pictures, and hang them up in your room, so that wherever you turn you can see yourself, as it were, in your own looking-glass. One may be as vain as one pleases, or anything else one pleases, if one is rich. And yet I thought I heard you the other day complaining about shortness of cash; to be sure it did not affect yourself, but only stood in the way of what was, after all, perhaps a Quixotic scheme of benevolence in connexion with an old cobbler——"

"I am not rich, my dear fellow," interrupted Walter gravely; "but when a man spends everything upon himself, as I once heard you observe, he can make a little money go a good way."

"I didn't say it of *you*," growled Pelter, touched with the other's resolute good-humour.

"No; I am sure you didn't, though, for that matter, I am just as selfish as other people. You are quite right in suggesting that I cannot afford to keep my pictures in general for my own delectation, nor even perhaps this particular one; and yet I do propose for once to indulge myself in the luxury. If you ask me why——"

"Not I!" struck in Jack savagely. "I am not a woman, that I should wish to pry into any man's secrets."

"There is no secret," said Walter hastily; "it is perhaps, after all, but a foolish sentiment."

"Of course it is. I know that much without your telling me," answered the other contemptuously. "But you will find such sentiments costly even for a rich man. What will they think of you at the Big Shop, when it is understood you do not wish to sell your pictures? They will say that it is occupying a space that might be better used; that you are taking the bread

out of some poor man's mouth ; and they will—for once—be right."

"I wish I had never sent the picture there at all," sighed Walter. "I don't mean that your advice, Jack, wasn't wise as well as kind," added he quickly, laying his hand on the other's arm ; "but I never thought this would have happened—that anybody would have wanted to buy it."

"Well, I never like talking about what I don't understand, so we'll say no more about it."

By the last post that night there came another letter for Walter.

"There's a second appeal to your hard heart," said Jack, who had by no means recovered his usual equanimity ; he was exceedingly annoyed by Litton's determination not to sell his picture, which he ascribed to morbid vanity. "If it's from the Trustees of the National Gallery, I do hope you will reconsider your objections."

"It is not from the Academy," said Walter, scrutinizing the envelope attentively. "It seems to me a lady's hand."

"Then I'll be off," replied Pelter, not sorry for once to leave the society of his friend.

“I hope it is not from Nellie Neale, to announce to grandmamma her intention of committing suicide for love of her venerable relative. I saw her yesterday, as I passed her father’s stall, and she looked ill enough and wretched enough for anything. What with his Red Riding-hoods and his pictures that are not to sell,” growled Jack, as he descended to his own den, “I believe the lad is half cracked.”

At any other moment this reference to Nellie Neale’s altered looks would have aroused Walter’s keenest sympathy, but as it was the words fell almost unheeded upon his ear. The idea had suddenly seized him that the note which he held in his hand was from Lotty herself, wrung from her perhaps by some extremity of poverty or sorrow. It was to the last degree unlikely that she should write to him, but it was possible ; and if she had done so, her need must be great indeed. He had witnessed her signature on the occasion of her marriage, and her handwriting was something like that in which the address of the note was written. Still, all women write alike. Moreover, there was a sort of typical initial upon the en-

velope—a Bee—which could scarcely have been adopted by her husband: if he had chosen anything characteristic for such a purpose—which was in itself highly improbable—it ought rather to have been a Butterfly, that is, if that insect's name had begun with an S. Upon the whole this surmise of Walter's almost bore out Mr. Pelter's indignant conjecture that his friend was not quite in his right mind, for, absurd as it was, it agitated him excessively. He tore the Bee all to pieces in his trepidation, and not until his eye had run to the signature, which was totally unknown to him, did he recover his usual calmness. The communication had reference to his picture, after all:—

“DEAR SIR,—I wish to know what price you have put upon your picture entitled ‘Supplication,’ 2940 in the Academy catalogue? I made inquiries of the clerk in charge, who will doubtless have communicated with you; but in order that no mistake may occur in the matter, I have ventured to thus address you personally. I

am very anxious to become the purchaser of the work in question.

“Yours obediently,

“ROBERT BURROUGHES.”

The hair was the hair of Esau, but the words were unmistakably Jacob's: the name, that is, was a man's name, but the handwriting, and especially the style, were beyond doubt those of a lady. Even Walter, who was by no means well versed in business matters, was struck with the imprudence of the words, “I am very anxious to become the purchaser,” addressed as they were to one who had placed no figure upon his goods. It would have been a very strong temptation to most people to ask a fancy price. Moreover, it was probable that a fancy price might really be paid—or, at all events, that Robert Burroughes was in a position to pay it, since his address was Willowbank, Regent's Park, one of those large houses standing in extensive grounds of their own, on the banks of the ornamental water, and which have been the envy of so many Londoners,

as combining in them the advantages both of town and country. Burroughes, it is true, was a very common name, but very common people are often uncommonly rich. If, instead of asking a hundred pounds, he were to ask double the money, it was quite possible he would get it. And two hundred pounds, as Walter confessed to himself, would be very useful to him. The fifty pounds he had lent to Selwyn he never expected to see again, nor even wished to do so—except so far as its repayment would have been proof of his friend's prosperity ; but the loan had left the balance at his banker's very low, so low that he had not re-engaged Red Riding-hood's services for several weeks, though he really had had occasion for them, and, what was more, felt she needed the money. As to what Pelter had said about her falling in love with him, the more he had thought of it the more ridiculous the notion had appeared to him. Nellie was an excellent sitter, and used to his ways, and he was fully determined to employ her again when he should be once more in funds. Yes, two hundred pounds would set him up for the next six months very comfortably : he

might ask this Mr. Burroughes for even more perhaps. But Walter's conscience was still young and tender: he did not even reason, as he might fairly have done: "I put a fancy price upon this picture myself, and therefore it is only just that I should charge another in the same proportion." He thought that, since two hundred pounds was double its fair market value, as assessed by Pelter, who knew the price of things, and was certainly not likely to *under-value* his friend's production—he ought not to ask a greater sum for it; and yet he did not feel inclined to give up the gratification of possessing the picture for that sum. He might, it is true, put such a price upon it as was prohibitory, and which his correspondent would understand as such; but that course had too strong a flavour of conceit—of "bumptiousness," as Jack would call it—to recommend itself to him. Finally, he sat down and wrote a note, acknowledging in courteous terms the compliment Mr. Burroughes had paid him, and expressing regret for the trouble to which that gentleman been put, but explaining that the picture was not for sale.

Then, late as it was, he went out and posted the letter ; not that he was afraid of being argued out of his determination by his friend, for he was tolerably certain that Pelter had said his last word upon the matter, but because he had doubts of his own firmness, if he should suffer his mind to dwell on so tempting an alternative. He felt that it would be for his happiness to keep the picture, yet also for his disadvantage. His reason told him that he had no right to indulge in such extravagance, his common-sense suggested: "If you must retain this picture, why not take a copy of it, and sell either that or the original to Mr. Burroughes ;" and he feared that their united force might overcome a certain feeling within him, which not only prompted him to keep the painting, but revolted against either it or a copy of it passing into the hands of any one else.





CHAPTER X.

THE UNKNOWN PATRON.

OF the fashion and appearance of Mr. Walter Litton's studio I have already spoken, though not at length: it was unnecessary to do so, since it was very much like other painting apartments of young gentlemen in his profession who have not as yet found themselves famous. It was dirty and dingy where the light fell upon it, and dirtier and dingier where it did not. The "slavey" in the Beech Street lodging-house had not much time to spare for cleansing operations, and still less inclination for them; she excused herself for all neglect upon the ground that "them artists did not like having their things meddled with;" and she did not run counter to their wishes in that respect. The bedrooms were not

much better looked after than the sitting-rooms, with one exception; that of Walter Litton's "was spick and span" as to order and cleanliness, and withal so prettily furnished, that it had obtained from Mr. John Pelter the somewhat contemptuous title of "the Bower." But the slavey had little to do with the Bower, which was "looked after" by an occasional retainer of Litton's own—an ancient charwoman, who came in once a week to make "a thorough turn-out," as she expressed it, of that apartment, and to dust its somewhat elaborate furniture.

"Mark my words, Litton," Jack once observed, while eyeing superciliously the shining wardrobe, the dressing-table with its snowy covering, and the various little knick-knacks which adorned the chamber of his friend—"you will marry early." He had uttered it in a tone of mournful conviction, as though he had said: "You will die young." He thought that all these things were signs of a domestic turn of mind in Walter, and presages of the matrimonial yoke; whereas they were perhaps but the result of a longer home experience (short as it had been) than poor Jack had had, and of

a university education. The contents of Mr. Pelter's studio ran over, as it were, into his sleeping apartment, in which were to be found various early efforts of his genius, which not even the picture dealers would regard with any favour, huddled together, like sheep in a storm, with their faces to the wall. Now, Walter's "Bower" did not smack of "the shop" at all: its only pictures were a small portrait of his mother, and two engravings, one of his old college, and one of the Head of that Royal and Religious Foundation, an austere unlikeable man, who had never looked kindly upon the young fellow, nor, indeed, in his own opinion, had had cause to do so, since Litton had "only not disgraced himself" by taking an ordinary degree; but still, for the sake of old times, there the hard old scholar hung. As Walter lay in bed that morning, thinking, his eye lit upon this portrait, and straightway his thoughts wandered to that time, not far back in point of years, and yet so distant from his present, when the work of life had not begun—to those college days, which, to such as he, not striving for collegiate prizes, are a three years' holiday,

a time of youth and friendship, such as can never be again. It had been an unreal time perhaps; a world quite different from the great work-a-day one; his judgment had been less mature than it was now: he felt, for instance, that Jack Pelter had more true grit in him—more bottom under the rough rubble—than perhaps any of his then companions; but some of them had been very bright and dear to him, one of them especially; a man not dear to him now: he felt that, in spite of himself, though he was neither envious nor jealous of him. He had never had much respect for Reginald Selwyn, but respect had not been so necessary a component of friendship as it had become now; he had loved him as an elder brother, without the insight into his character that such consanguinity compels. All that was over now; and why? He did not answer that question to himself, although he put it; but his thoughts somehow wandered back to the subject they had started from, and which had even mingled with his dreams—his picture in the Academy. There was a bare space on the walls of his little room, above the fireplace, and he now made

up his mind that there it should be hung. He would not sell it, even if the chance of doing so should once more offer itself, which was very unlikely. On the whole, he did not regret that note he had posted overnight to Mr. Burroughes of the Regent's Park. He heard his friend splashing in his bath in the room below, and afterwards whistling, as his custom was, over his careless toilet. Jack's good-humour had doubtless returned to him long ere this, but still he would say nothing to him about that tempting offer. He would keep his own counsel, and let him suppose the letter had been a *billet-doux*, a dun, a challenge—what he pleased, in fact, so long as his guess was wide of the mark. When, however, he descended as usual to breakfast with his friend, and found him frank and hearty as ever, his conscience smote him for his reticence; he had, it is true, already one secret of his own, into which Jack had not been permitted to look—namely, his tenderness for Lotty—but that was an affair as private, and almost as sacred, as his prayers; whereas this offer for his picture he felt to be almost a common property between them, for without Jack's

advice he would never have sent it to the Academy at all: they had consulted together over it, both as to its price and its merits, and not a few of the latter had, he confessed to himself, been owing to the other's suggestions. A certain sense of ingratitude, and also the knowledge that there was something about which they could not converse, weighed upon Walter's spirits, and he was not himself that morning. It was quite a relief to him to escape from Jack, and find himself in his own room alone. And yet he was not at ease even there; the same almost feminine tenderness of disposition that had caused him to retain his picture for the sake of the associations connected with it, gave him pain, because of his treatment of his friend. He could not set to work as usual. To some it may seem easy for a painter to do this under any circumstances; an author, it may be thought, whose mind is troubled, is likely enough to be incapacitated from employing his mind in composition; but a painter can have no such excuse. And this is probably true enough of a painter who is also a glazier. But the work of the artist—and Walter Lit-

ton, though his talents were immature, and often misdirected, was a true artist—is not mechanical, although he labours with his hands. If he had had a model before him, Walter could perhaps have compelled his attention to the canvas, but as it was it was distracted by other thoughts: he made up his mind that he would call at the cobbler's that very day, and engage Red Riding-hood, if, indeed, she was well enough to resume her sittings. He could not quite recall what Pelter had said about her, though he knew there was something wrong. His whole mind was confused and jaded, and incapable of effort. Perhaps it was that glass of malt liquor, which, contrary to his habit, he had taken after breakfast that morning, for the sake of good-fellowship, and to make up to his beer-drinking friend for other shortcomings. At eleven o'clock the slavey brought him a letter—not on a silver salver, genteel reader, but in her damp red hand—and she grinned as she delivered it: like the last, it was in a lady's hand, but it was not on that account that she grinned, for she did not know one handwriting from another.

"Why, I never heard the postman's knock, Jenny," said Walter kindly.

"It tain't the postman," said she, stuffing the end of her apron into her mouth to stifle a giggle; "it be an ever-so-big footman, with a white head with an illigant split in it, and a bell-rope at his shoulder."

"That's called a shoulder-knot, Jenny. Ah, very good"—he had rapidly cast his eye over the contents of the letter—"tell him to wait, and I will write an answer."

His tone was careless, but the note had in fact surprised him very much. It came from the same address as before, and was in the same hand:—

"DEAR SIR"—it began—"I am in receipt of your letter, in which you state that your picture is not for sale. At the risk of being deemed impertinent, I write to you once more to express a hope that you may be induced to reconsider this decision. That the work is very meritorious as a painting I have no doubt; but its artistic merits, if I may say so without offence, are its least attraction in my eyes; I have quite another reason for wishing to possess it. It is

difficult, impossible, indeed, to explain this by letter; but if your resolve not to part with it is capable of change, I would earnestly entreat you to give me a few minutes' conversation upon this subject. I am confined to my house by a severe attack of gout, or I would do myself the honour of calling on you; but as that is impossible, might I ask the favour of your looking in on me, at any hour you please to name—this day, if possible? The bearer will await your reply.

“Yours faithfully,

“ROBERT BURROUGHS.”

The gout from which this gentleman was suffering was certainly not in his hand, for the writing was firm and distinct, though very feminine in its character. Walter felt so curious about the whole affair, that he had almost a mind to summon the ever-so-big footman with the bell-rope, and question him about his master; but such a proceeding would, to say the least of it, have been undignified. Jack had often warned him never to express surprise with respect to any application for a picture, “however much

and naturally you may be yourself astonished at it." Of course, if he was obstinately resolved not to part with this one, he had simply to pen a few words to that effect, and there was an end to the matter. But he did not wish to act so abruptly; partly, because it seemed rude to do so, but still more because he had a strong desire to have this mystery solved. It was not very flattering to find that his *chef-d'œuvre* was not in demand on account of its own merits, and yet that "quite another reason" so excited his curiosity that he scarcely felt the wound to his self-love. Nay, he even felt some sympathy with Mr. Robert Burroughes, in that he felt his own affection for the picture did not rest upon the ground either of its conception or execution; but upon something else, albeit that something could not be common between them. At all events he resolved to see this would-be patron, and to be civil to him, though he by no means made up his mind to let the picture go. There might be something in it which had struck Mr. Burroughes's fancy that was capable of repetition, and this might procure him an

order for another work. Though he had been so self-willed and obdurate in this particular affair, Walter was not blind to his own interests in a general way, nor less desirous of making his way in the world than any other young fellow. So he wrote a polite note to say that he would do himself the pleasure of calling at Willowbank that afternoon, at three o'clock, and despatched it by the white-headed footman.

Then a sudden impulse moved him to run downstairs and place both the letters of Mr. Burroughes in the hands of faithful Jack, and he obeyed it.

"My dear Watty," said the other, looking not at them, but at him, with his kind eyes, "are you sure you are right about this? You are not going to make me your confidant, I hope, because you think I am huffy and vexed with you? That is all over and gone, as far as I am concerned."

"I daresay I seemed foolish and impracticable," answered Walter, "but I really had my reasons."

"And very likely sufficient ones, my

lad. I don't say that your resolution to keep your picture was no business of mine, for what concerns you must needs concern me, but I feel that I was dictatorial about it."

"Not a bit, Jack. Please don't say another word about it."

"But these letters — there are some things, Watty, you know, that one should not tell even to one's friends, for the sake of others—are you sure I have a right to see them?"

"Certainly you have, since I give them to you. It's the funniest thing that ever happened, you will say."

"Are they from a woman, Watty?" inquired Jack, still hesitating.

"Not they, though the handwriting looks like it. They're all about that picture, from a Mr. Robert Burroughes."

Jack read them carefully, but without the smile that Walter had expected to see illumine his jolly face.

"There's something wrong here, my lad," said he gravely. "These letters are not from a man, in my opinion; they're from a

woman ; and she doesn't want your picture at all."

"What the deuce does she want, then? You don't mean to say that she wants *me*! —that she has fallen in love with your humble servant, as you always said little Red Riding-hood would do! You will make me a coxcomb." Walter was not a coxcomb, but he did remember how Selwyn had said: "My aunt has fallen in love with you," on his first meeting with that lady, and also the attention she subsequently paid to him at Penaddon.

"No, Walter; I don't seriously think Miss Nellie has done that, although I fear there is something amiss with her in that way; and if she were, the misfortune would be almost wholly on her side; but if this—this communication should be what I suspect it is, the misfortune would be on your side."

"You must have been reading the adventures of Mr. Tom Jones, or Mr. Gil Blas, of late, Jack."

"No; but I have been reading human nature—though not the best side of it,

perhaps—for more years than you have. I could tell you a story of real life that mates with that of the Lady Clara Vere de Vere of your favourite poet; only with a difference. I could tell you, I say”—and here Jack began to pace the room with rapid strides—“of a young fellow still in his teens, for whom a fine lady once entertained a great passion. Perhaps she would have married him, if she could; perhaps she only persuaded him that such was her desire. She wrote to him, sometimes by the post, sometimes by just such a wonderful footman as I saw here in our passage this morning; she invited him to her house. She flattered, fondled, spoilt him. He was a lad like yourself, ingenuous, high-spirited, with a future—a great future, as he thought, poor devil—before him. She was older than he, though she did not look it, and she had more than twice his wits. It was an unequal match in more senses than one, and the weaker one went to the wall. There are some things, as I have just said, that it is well for a man to be silent about, even to his best friend, but I will tell you this much—that woman ruined the lad. He did not

cut his throat, you understand, like 'young Lawrence'—it would have been better for him, perhaps, if he had—but he lost all he had, his heart, his hopes, his faith: she killed him."

"He is dead, then?" said Walter gravely.

"Yes, boy; he died years and years ago, God help him! It is not a pleasant story," continued Pelter, after a pause; "but I have told you it, because I don't want you to perish in the same pitfall. Of course I may be all wrong in supposing that there is any risk. Most people will laugh at such a danger, which seems to them imaginary, will call it ridiculous, impossible, and the like; and perhaps it would have been impossible in their case; but most people are fools. Such things, it is true, don't happen often, but they do happen."

It would have been easy enough for a much duller man than Walter Litton to perceive that Pelter had been speaking of himself: his bitter excited tone, his looks, his very gait, as he walked hastily to and fro, as if impatient of the folly he described, betrayed it.

But for this, Walter himself would have

ridiculed the story, and did ridicule it even now, so far as it had application to his own position. That Mr. Robert Burroughes should turn out to be a middle-aged lady of high rank, who had fallen in love with him unknown to himself, tickled his sense of humour; if it was so, it seemed to him that the Bee (and it was a very large one) impressed upon her envelopes was also in her bonnet—that she must be mad.

“But you would not wish me to cancel my appointment at Willowbank?” inquired he, and his eye twinkled with fun in spite of himself, “for I have made one for three o’clock.”

“Of course not. But remember my story, and forget, please, that it was I who told it.”

“I will,” said Walter, made serious by his friend’s unwonted tone, which was at once abrupt and pathetic. It was evident that in this case good advice *had* cost the giver something.

“No,” continued Pelter in his old manner; “I daresay your visit will turn out to be commonplace enough. Mr. Burroughes is doubtless only an eccentric old fellow, who

takes fancies to pictures, and doesn't care what he gives for them. Your refusal to part with yours has probably whetted his appetite, and may turn out to be the happiest fluke for you."

"Thank you for the compliment. If he had taken a fancy to one of yours, you would not have set it down to his eccentricity, I'll warrant, Mr. Pelter."

And so they parted, not to meet again till just as Walter was starting on his mysterious errand.

"You see I have got myself up, Jack, to the best of my ability," said he, smiling, "in case Mr. Burroughes should turn out to be a countess."

"Quite right," returned the other dryly. "I have been to the Academy, and the man tells me that it *was* a lady who asked the price of your picture; moreover, I have looked in the Blue-book, and no such person as Burroughes lives at Willowbank, Regent Park."

"Then perhaps, after all, it is a hoax," said Walter, with an air of very considerable disgust.

"No, no; that footman could never have


demeaned himself by mixing himself up with anything of that sort. I should as soon believe that the Lord Chancellor played leap-frog on the woolsack. Good-bye, and luck be with you."





CHAPTER XI.

BARGAINING.

T a little before three o'clock—for, though an artist, he was punctual, and even methodical in his habits—Walter Litton presented himself at the lodge-gate of Willowbank. A carriage-drive that wound among a pretty shrubbery just clothed in its first summer tints, so as to suggest the notion of extent to what was—for London—in reality a considerable frontage, led to the entrance-door of the mansion; its principal windows, however, looked upon a smooth, shelving lawn, which sloped down to the water, and was, even at that season, gay with parterres of flowers. To left and right of it were more shubberies, interspersed with some fine, if not stately trees; nor was there anything to suggest

that the place was within miles of the Great Metropolis, except that solemn, far-off roar, which might well be taken for the murmur of the summer sea; so like to it it was, indeed, that for a moment Walter's thoughts flashed to Penaddon Hall, where that sound was never unheard; albeit no two places could, in other respects, be more dissimilar than the Hall and the spot in which he now found himself. *There*, the poverty of the tenant had compelled neglect; whereas *here*, the most perfect neatness and completeness that money could insure were evident on all sides. The carriage sweep might have been made of cayenne pepper, so bright and delicate was the gravel of which it was composed; the grass that fringed the laurel beds might have been cut with a razor; and every shrub and flower looked as though it had been the gardener's peculiar care. So rare, too, seemed many of them, that it would not have surprised him if each had had a ticket appended to it, as at Kew, explaining its name and *habitat*. His ring at the front-door was answered by a stately personage of ecclesiastical, nay, Episcopal type, who appeared to regard his

having come on foot as quite phenomenal. He looked to right and left of his visitor through the glass door before he opened it, in obvious search after the usual equipage.

"Is Mr. Burroughes within?" inquired Walter, not a little amused by this expressive pantomime.

"Mr. Burroughes?" repeated the man in a doubtful tone.

"Then it *is* a hoax," thought Walter. "Yes, I received a letter this morning," said he aloud.

"O yes, sir; it's quite right," interrupted the other, as if recollecting himself. "Mr. Litton, I believe? My master is expecting you."

He led the way through a hall of marble; in which stood two colossal vases of great beauty, and some statues of life-size, which Walter's hurried glance perceived were of no mean merit, into a sitting-room looking on the lawn, and then withdrew. It was a small apartment, but very richly furnished, and to those with whom newness is not a bar to admiration, in excellent taste. The walls were lined with books, in bright but not gaudy bindings; the floor was of

polished oak, and bare, except in the centre, which was covered by a rich carpet, in which the feet sank as in luxuriant moss; the furniture was also of oak, but of the most modern—that is, of the most comfortable make. Next the window was a table rather out of character with its surroundings, for though of polished and well-kept appearance, it was in fact a plain office desk of deal, such as a merchant's clerk might work at in the City. It was laden, however, with accessories, whose splendour was greatly in excess of their use; in particular, upon a golden tripod were a watch, a weather-glass, and a thermometer, all made of the same precious metal. The singularity of this ornament attracted Walter's attention, and upon the foot of it he read inscribed along with the date of a few months back the words, "To our dear Papa, upon his Birthday."

"Good heavens," murmured Walter to himself, "perhaps there are *two* countesses!"

At that moment the door opened, and there limped in a short, stout man, by no means so important-looking as the butler, but with an air of proprietorship, nevertheless, about which there could be no mis-

take. "Mr. Litton, I believe?" said he, without offering to shake hands. "Be so good as to take a seat;" and he himself, not without difficulty and much help from his stick, contrived to get into an armchair. His face was flabby rather than fat, with very little colour, and showed signs more of care than thought; his tone was peevish, and his manner somewhat uneasy, not such as is usually worn by a man of great substance in his own house.

"You have come about that picture in the Academy?"

"I have; or rather, you requested me to come about it, Mr. Burroughes," answered Walter with some dignity.

"Well, well; it is all the same. I am not Mr. Burroughes, however; my name is Brown—Christopher Brown." And the little man drew himself up stiffly, as though the name—in connexion with the Christopher—ought to be an impressive one.

Walter did not remember to have heard of the name, and he resented this behaviour of its proprietor extremely. "I can only deal with principals," said he, his indignation leaving him no choice of words, and

causing him to use a conventional phrase, which had really but little meaning, and of which he repented immediately. The reply, however, seemed to please his companion well enough.

"That's a very sensible observation, young man, and shows you have some knowledge of business. However, I *am* the principal in this case; Mr. Burroughes is the Co., and of no consequence. It is I who wish to buy your picture. You don't seem to be in a hurry to part with it—that is very sensible too. We are never in a hurry to part with anything in the City—if we can help it. That is what we call 'standing out.'"

Walter bowed stiffly; he was not quite sure what the stout gentleman meant, but he had a strong suspicion that he was drawing a parallel between Art and sordid Trade.

"I do not quite comprehend your meaning, Mr. Brown."

"I mean—this question resolves itself, I suppose, like all other questions, into those two pregnant words, *How Much?*"

"Not quite," returned Walter coldly.

"If that had been the case, I should have named my price for the picture, and then you might have taken it or left it, as you chose."

"You must be in independent circumstances, young man," observed the other sarcastically. "And yet Beech Street is not a very highly rented locality, I believe."

"Perhaps not; and yet, if you visited me in Beech Street, I should behave to you like a gentleman, sir," cried Walter seizing his hat.

"Highly tighty! Don't fly into a passion, Mr. What's-your-name; I didn't mean to offend you. Sit ye down, sit ye down, and let us discuss this matter in a quiet, sensible manner."

"I had rather stand," said Walter; "thank you."

"Well, well; as you like. I wish I could stand as well. Come, let us say fifty pounds. You are a young man, a very young man. By George! I wish I was half as young. You have got your way to make in the world. When I was your age I didn't get fifty pounds for a week's work, nor yet five. My time was not so valuable."

"Perhaps not, sir," answered Walter hotly, "and I hope it is not very valuable now, since you are wasting it. I wish you a very good morning;" and he moved towards the door.

"Why, how much *do* you want?" cried the old gentleman, slewing round upon his chair so as to face his companion. "I'll give you a hundred pounds. You are certainly not famous enough to refuse a hundred pounds."

"Famous or not," answered Walter in a fury, "you shall not have it for that money;" and he laid his hand upon the door.

"Stop, sir, stop!" cried the old gentleman. "I have a wish to possess that picture—for a reason that you cannot understand;" and here his voice sank low. "It is not a matter of money's worth to me."

"I thought everything resolved itself into those two pregnant words, *How Much?*" answered Walter scornfully.

"I am an old man, sir, and you are a young one," returned the other; "perhaps I presumed too much upon that; in my time it made a difference. Don't let us

quarrel. Your picture may be perfection, for what I know, and you shall have your price for it—that is in reason. My cheque-book lies in that desk ; I will pay you upon the nail—this instant. Come, shall I make it two hundred pounds?”

“No, sir. You say that you wish to buy the picture for a reason that I could not understand. Well, I wish to keep it for a reason that would at least be equally unintelligible to you.”

“I will give you *three* hundred golden sovereigns for that little picture. It cannot be worth more than three hundred pounds.”

“It is not worth so much, sir,” answered Walter coldly, “and yet I will not sell it you.”

“You will not sell it to me!” cried the old man angrily. “Then why did you come here? To insult me, to disappoint me, to——” Here he stopped, then added plaintively: “Young man, you are very cruel.” He had a haggard and weary look, which moved the other in spite of his wrath.

“I ought not to have come here, sir, I own,” answered he slowly, “since I did not mean to sell my picture. If you had be-

haved otherwise, or given me your reason for desiring to possess it—no, forgive me”—for across the old man's face here flitted a look of intense pain—"that is an impertinence; I mean, if you had convinced me that the possession of it would have been dear to you, from whatever cause, as it is to me, perhaps I would have parted with it. This surprises you; and yet one gives one's horse or one's dog away, where they are cared for and appreciated, and not otherwise. However, as matters stand, I feel I owe you an apology, an explanation. There is an association—to me—in connexion with that painting, which forbids me to part with it for its fair price; and to take advantage of your fancy for it, to extort more, seems to me shameful."

"But if I don't mind it—if money is nothing to me!" exclaimed the old man eagerly. "I don't say it *is* nothing; three hundred pounds is three hundred pounds to everybody."

"I know it, sir. To me, indeed, it is a very large sum," remarked Walter quietly.

"Well, to be frank, young man, it is to me but a mere drop in the ocean."

“Very likely. Still, to take it from you—since a rich man’s whim is his master—would be to trade upon your necessity.”

“Nonsense! Wheel that desk here, and let me write out the cheque.”

“I would not take it, if it was for three thousand. Good morning, sir.”

Walter opened the door, but as he did so, he felt it pushed toward him, and there entered—Lotty!

“Mr. Litton, I believe?” said she, with a pleasant smile. “Good morning.”





CHAPTER XII.

LILY.

WALTER could scarcely believe his senses, when he beheld thus standing before him the girl of whom for the last six months the image had been more or less present to his mental vision, but whom, with his physical eyes, he had never thought to see again. To meet her at such a time and place was most unlooked for and extraordinary; but still more surprising was it to see her so unchanged in beauty, not bright and radiant, indeed—for that, even on her marriage morning, she had not been; in the very flush of bridehood her heart had not ceased to be agitated by thoughts of home—but still in good health, her eyes undimmed with tears, her face unlined with cares, her voice as musical and

cheery as when he had first heard its well-remembered tones. All this was like enchantment; but what beyond all astounded him, and stilled his tongue, and seemed to paralyse his very limbs, was the fact that she had not recognised him; that she had said "Mr. Litton, I believe?" and then in the most unconcerned, though courteous manner, had added "Good morning," as though he were no more than an utter stranger.

He stood dumb and motionless for a few seconds, staring at her, in her pretty garden costume and summer hat, until the little blush he knew so well crept from her cheek to her white brow.

"He sees the likeness," muttered the old man plaintively.

"To the picture," replied Lotty quickly. "Yes, it is very curious. I hope that you have come to terms, papa, with this gentleman."

"With this gentleman!" repeated Walter to himself, like one in a dream. It was impossible that she did not recognise him; there must then be some reason for her ignoring their acquaintance. Was

possible that that terrible Mrs. Sheldon had breathed to her that shameful imputation of his being at heart a rival in the affections of her husband, and that hence she had resolved to know him no more!

She kept her eyes studiously averted from him, and fixed upon her father.

"No," sighed the old man; "we have not come to terms. Perhaps I have mismanaged the affair. Mr. What's-his-name——"

"Litton," suggested Lotty softly.

"Mr. Litton has refused to part with his picture at any price. 'Not,' he said, 'for three thousand pounds.'"

"Excuse me, sir," said Walter; "do not let this young lady imagine me to be extortionate—or mad. Such a sum was never seriously mentioned. On the contrary, I said that the three hundred which you offered was far beyond its worth."

"Then why not take it, sir?" inquired Lotty, looking at him face to face, and speaking in gentle but firm tones. "I wrote to you—at my father's request—to intimate that it was not for the mere merits of the picture—great as they undoubtedly are—that he was desirous of possessing it."

"The note then was from you?" said Walter, hardly conscious of what he said.

"Yes; I thought I said that my father was incapacitated from addressing you himself; at all events, it was so; I was his amanuensis. I said, if you had not resolutely made up your mind to keep the picture, we hoped that you would call in person. Since you have done so, it seems unreasonable that you will not accept my father's offers."

"That is right," said the old man approvingly. "You put it better than I did. Listen to her, Mr. Litton."

"My father has an especial wish to possess the painting," continued Lotty decisively, "and it seems to me that, under such circumstances, it is cruel to withhold it. I put it to your sense of honour."

"That is quite unnecessary," answered Walter frigidly. "Your daughter's arguments have convinced me, sir," said he, turning to the old man. "The picture is yours." He had no longer any desire to retain it, since she who, if not its original, had been the inspirer of whatever in it had-

made it dear to him, could treat him with such neglect.

"You are a good fellow!" cried his host triumphantly—"you are an excellent young fellow! Wheel up my desk, my dear, and I will give him the three hundred. And I tell you what, sir, I'll make it guineas."

"Excuse me, sir; my price is one hundred pounds," observed Walter coldly. "I shall not take a penny more."

"Not a penny more!" cried the old man, holding his pen in the air. "Why, you must be what you called yourself just now—mad; stark, staring mad."

"That is the just price—the price at which it was assessed by a friend of mine, who is a good judge of such things, when it went to the Academy; and I shall take no more. Please to write out one hundred pounds."

"I am afraid, papa," said Lotty softly, "that we have offended this gentleman; and that therefore he will not be beholden to us."

"I did not mean any offence, young man," said Mr. Brown. "It seems to me that folks are very sensitive nowadays; there is

no knowing where to have them. I wished to make a fair bargain with you, Mr. Litton ; that is my notion of doing business, and it has served me for the last fifty years ; but I certainly had no intention of ruffling your feathers. Well, there is your hundred pounds."

"Oh, papa!" said Lotty.

"My dear, I have only done as the young gentleman has directed me ; I conclude he knows his own mind."

"You are very right, sir," answered Walter. "The picture shall be sent to you directly the Exhibition is over."

"Very good. I wont offer to shake hands with you, young man, because I can't ; but I am truly obliged to you" (this he pronounced "obleegeed," but in a friendly and even grateful tone). "If the obligation were on your side instead of mine, I should venture to ask a favour of you."

"Pray ask it, sir," said Walter, "all the same."

"Well then stay and dine with us. We are none of your fashionables, who require white ties and that ; and there are only our two selves." A sort of pathos mingled

with his speech that touched the young fellow. "We dine early—that is, what I daresay *you* will call early, though I call it late; the time I used to sup at. My daughter here will show you about the place in the meantime."

This invitation, which but an hour ago would have been a temptation against which he would have struggled in vain, had now no charms for him. And yet he had a mind to accept it, if it were only that it would give him the opportunity of reproaching Lotty for her repudiation of him—for what he no longer hesitated to term her ungrateful behaviour towards him. There was some reason for it, of course; but if it was in consequence of anything that Mrs. Sheldon had said to her, she ought not to have listened to it; and if it was for any cause connected with her father, she surely might have acknowledged his identity to himself, without betraying the recognition to his host.

"I shall be very glad to show Mr. Litton the garden," said she in cold but courteous tones: "it is not very extensive, but still, for London——"

"I will stay and dine with pleasure," interrupted Walter with decision. This woman's hypocrisy was beyond all bearing, and he longed to tell her what he thought about it; that cool, "still, for London," of hers, when she was in all probability at that very moment contrasting the place in her own mind with the wild luxuriance of the garden at Penaddon, in which he had walked in her company so often, and not six months ago, was too much for his patience.

"Well, come, that's settled," said the old man, not without some irritation, for it was plain that his invitation had "hung" in the young painter's mind, and Mr. Christopher Brown, of Willowbank, was not accustomed to give invitations that were accepted only with reluctance. "There, take him out, Lily, and show him the ducks."

Lily! The quiet utterance of that simple name staggered Walter like a thunderbolt, for it was accompanied by a flash of intelligence that altered all things to his mental vision. This then was not Lotty, but Lotty's sister; a twin-sister, without doubt (though she had never mentioned that she was a twin), since even to his eyes there

had seemed absolutely no difference between them. The same bright trustful face that had haunted his dreams, as though an angel had hovered over him; the same delicate features; the same abundance of rich brown hair; the same sweet, gentle voice, that he had thought was without its peer in woman, belonged to both—only tender gratitude had been lacking, as was natural enough; it was not to be expected that Lotty's sister should feel towards him like Lotty. Still it was incomprehensible that even Lily should not have recognised his name.

She led the way out of doors, and he followed her, tongue-tied, stunned by this inexplicable fact. Surely, surely she would now tell him, now that they were alone, that she knew him well by her sister's report, though it had not been advisable to say so before her father, on account of the hand he had had in Lotty's elopement.

"This view from the lawn, Mr. Litton, we think is very pretty," were her first words, spoken in pleasant conversational tones, such as befitted a cicerone who was also his hostess. "Some people object to its looking out upon the Park with its

nurserymaids and children, but I am not so exclusive."

"There can be nothing objectionable in seeing people enjoy themselves, I should think," said Walter; his voice was cold and rather "huffy," but she did not seem to notice that.

"No, indeed," she replied; "that is quite my opinion: I like to see them, and I flatter myself that we give as well as take, for our garden looks very pretty from that side of the water, though I can't say as much for the house. If you wanted to paint a picturesque residence, you would not choose Willowbank for your model, I am afraid. It is scarcely one's ideal of a dwelling-place."

"It has some good points," said Walter. "I should take them, and reject others; that is how the 'ideal' is represented, I fancy, by most artists."

"Is that how you painted 'Supplication?'" said Lily, stopping suddenly; and looking up at him.

They were now on the winding path that fringed the water, and shut out from the view of the house by trees and shrubs.

"Yes," said he, after a moment's hesitation; "I drew it, that is, partly from memory, and partly from imagination."

"Then there really was an original, was there?"

"I can scarcely say that; the person that sat for it was not the person I had in my mind. I think, to judge from what your father said about it, when you entered yonder room, that he at least recognised the original."

"He hinted that it was like myself," said Lily quietly, "though I think that was an outrageous compliment."

"I do not say *that*," said Walter brusquely; "but it is certainly not so like you as it is like your sister."

"Ah, it *was* taken from life, then!" exclaimed she, "I always thought that a likeness such as that could not have been a mere coincidence. It is not so much in form or feature, as in expression, that it so much reminds me of dear Lotty. You have known her, then"—and here she heaved an involuntary sigh—"since her marriage?"

"No, not since, but before it. She must

surely have told you how I chanced to be in the train with Selwyn when he went down to Cornwall, and how it all happened?"

"She told me that he had a friend with him, but did not mention his name."

"Why, it was I who gave her away!" said Walter bitterly.

His disappointment and humiliation were so excessive that they could not be concealed.

"You must forgive her," said Lilian gently, "in consideration of her position. Love is a great monopolizer, and leaves little room in us save for the beloved object. Besides, she had a good reason for not mentioning your name; it would have set us, she knew, against you. You would not have been made welcome, for example, in this house, had my father known that it was you who helped to——" Her voice quivered, the tears began to fall. "O, Mr. Litton," sighed she, "it was an evil day that took dear Lotty from us!"

"I am grieved, indeed, to hear it," answered Walter gravely. "It was no fault of mine, I do assure you. I may seem to you a culprit, but I am wholly

innocent in the matter ; indeed, what little I did do was to dissuade Selwyn. If she told you all, she must have told you that."

"It is done now, Mr. Litton, and cannot be undone," answered Lilian. "But it is better that you should not speak of this to my father. Your picture has touched his heart, and made it more tender towards her who was once his darling, and I am grateful to you on that account ; but do not let him know what you have just told me. He might think perhaps that you had been set on to do it by—by Reginald."

They walked on together slowly, and in silence ; then Lily spoke again : "You have not seen her since her marriage, you say ; how did you know then that she was so changed?"

This was a question that was not easy for him to answer. He could not tell her that Lotty's supposed misery was constantly presenting itself to him ; that his imagination had been coloured with sadness because of her, and had pictured her to him accordingly.

"I have seen her husband," said he evasively.

“And he told you, did he?” answered she with a pleased air. “No doubt he is less indifferent than he seems—not that he is unkind,” added she hastily. “Do not suppose that I wish to be hard upon your friend; only it seemed to me that he did not notice her changed looks.”

“Is she much changed?” asked Walter softly.

“Yes; greatly changed from what you must remember her before her marriage. She has been—nay, she still is—in sad trouble, banished from her home. Perhaps I ought not to speak of such things,” said Lily plaintively, “but my tongue has kept involuntary silence so long, and it is so hard to brood and brood over a sorrow, and have none to whom to tell it.”

“It is very hard, as I know myself,” answered Walter gravely; “if it is any comfort to you, pray speak to me as to one who has your sister’s happiness at heart. I may say so much, I hope, without impertinence; since, though I was acquainted with her for so short a time, and there has been so great an interval since, it was under such circumstances as make acquaintance friend-

ship. It was I who telegraphed to you at the drawing-school from the Reading Station."

"Then you cost me the severest pang, Mr. Litton, that my heart has known," said Lilian, with a shudder. "The sudden shock of it, the terror of the thought that I had to tell papa of it, and the dreadful, dreadful hour in which I *did* tell him!" And she hid her face, as though to shut out the recollection of another's—Walter pictured to himself Mr. Christopher Brown's, the possessor of an income that could perhaps be counted by tens of thousands, when he first heard that his daughter had run away with a penniless soldier, and pitied her from the bottom of his soul. "You see, Lotty was his favourite," continued she, doubtless in unconscious apology for some outbreak of paternal wrath; "and her leaving us stabbed him to the heart. It seemed to him ingratitude as well as rebellion. Dear Lotty herself understands that, as she told me before I was forbidden to see her. Papa's life was wrapped up in us two—in her especially—and when he found she had left him for a stranger—— O indeed, he has suffered too!"

“I have no doubt of that. But is there no chance of a reconciliation between them?”

“Two days ago, Mr. Litton, I should have said—None whatever. He was very resolute against her; very angry that I had been to see her; and forbade me ever to write to her, or to mention her name within his hearing. But yesterday morning, at the Academy, he saw your picture, and I could see he recognised it, though her face was not as he had known it. I had told him how weary and worn she looked, but had not moved him; but when he saw her on your canvas——”

“Take time, take time,” said Walter kindly, for the girl was sobbing bitterly; “I would not pain you to recount all this, but that it may be better for your sister’s sake that I should hear it; that I should know how to answer your father when he comes to question me, as perhaps he will.”

“No, no; he will never speak of it to you or anybody,” answered she despondingly: “but when he comes to possess the picture, when he looks upon it daily, as I shall take care he does, I shall

have hopes. That he should have mentioned the likeness in your presence, was an unlooked-for tenderness. He loves her still, I know, but he is ashamed to own it. It will be very, very long, I fear, if ever, before he forgives her. Oh, sir, do tell me truly"—she looked up at him with clasped hands and streaming eyes—"is Captain Selwyn a good man?"

"A good man? Well, men are not good, Miss Lilian, as young ladies are"—he should not have called her by her Christian name, but she looked so pitiful and child-like in her sorrow, that he was moved to do so—"but he is a brave soldier and a gentleman, and such are always kind to women, even when they are not their wives, and how much more when they have given up home and friends and fortune to become their brides. I was at school and college with him, where he was most popular with all of us, and I was his dearest friend."

"Why do you say 'was,' Mr. Litton? A friend is a friend for ever, is he not?"

"But Selwyn is proud; and being poor, as I am afraid he is, he has withdrawn him-

self from me of late, though I myself am poor enough, Heaven knows. If he were rich, this marriage would have taken place as a matter of course; he would have been a welcome son-in-law; and you, the sister of his wife, would never have had these doubts about him."

"That is true, Mr. Litton, and you give me much comfort," answered Lilian gratefully. "I have not felt so hopeful since—since Lotty left us. How dreadful it is that money—or the want of it—should work such ruin!"

"Money is much, Miss Lilian," answered Walter; "and if not a blessing to those who have it, a sad lack to those who have it not."

"Yet you do not care for money, Mr. Litton, or you would not have returned my father's cheque."

"Oh yes, I do," replied he, smiling: "only other things are as dear to me, or dearer. Besides, though I have but little, I do not need it, as poor Selwyn does."

"Yes, indeed," sighed she; "they are very poor. She told me, that if it had not been for some small sum advanced them by

a friend of Captain Selwyn's—I think it was but fifty pounds—they would have been in absolute want. Oh, is it not terrible to think of that, while I am living here in comfort—splendour! Don't think harshly of me for it; I have done what I could——”

“I am sure of that,” interrupted Walter earnestly; “indeed, Selwyn told me so himself.”

“Did he?” answered she eagerly. “I am glad of that. I mean to say, I was afraid he thought I had not done my best; that I might have parted with—things my father gave me. He does not understand papa, or that such a course would have injured Lotty in the end. As it is, there is some hope—thanks to you for the first gleam of it—that nature is asserting herself within him. He is jealous of my suspecting such a change, but it is at work. This desire to have your picture is evidence of it; and especially the pains he took to conceal his own part in the matter. It was at his request that I wrote to you in the name of Mr. Burroughes—his solicitor—so that you should not discover, in case you were really acquainted with

Lotty, that the application came from her father."

"I see," said Walter thoughtfully, "and I agree with you that it augurs well. Should all come right by the help of my poor picture, I shall be glad indeed."

"I am sure you will; and you may be proud as well as glad, for never can Art have achieved a nobler end than to restore a daughter to her father."

"If it had but been designed," sighed Walter.

"Nay, but no less the skill," answered Lilian promptly. "It was not only that you remembered Lotty's face, and drew it, but that you portrayed the story of her sorrow, and touched my father's heart with its relation. We are your debtors for that, at all events, and I for one shall not easily forget it."

Where was it, and on what occasion, that Walter had once before—and only once—experienced the sensations he felt now—that bliss of grateful acknowledgment; the thrill of a tone more exquisite than any music; the sunshine of a smile more beautiful than Murillo ever painted? At Penaddon, when

Lotty had thanked him for his escort and assistance. But with his happiness had mingled then a pain, and now there was no pain, but only happiness. Lotty stood once more before him, or so it seemed, but there was no Reginald to come between them.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMMISSION.



AT the little dinner-party at Willow-bank that afternoon there was not much talk, yet Walter thought that he had never enjoyed so pleasant a meal; Mr. Brown did his best, though it evidently cost him an effort to play the host, and if his civilities had something of patronage about it, the young painter was in no humour to resent it. The rich man's swelling sense of importance, and decisive manner of laying down the law, as though wealth could confer the power of judging rightly on all subjects, did not arouse his contempt; for this old man, the father of Lotty and of Lilian, had awakened a strange interest within him. Lilian, accustomed to be silent in her father's presence, spoke but

little, yet all she did say had sense and kindness in it; when they spoke of art, she exhibited no raptures, such as most women use when they wish to be thought enthusiastic; nor, on the other hand, did she advance her opinions under cover of that sorry shield of pretended ignorance: "I know nothing about it, you know; please tell me if I am wrong, &c.," which so often conceals a stubborn conceit. When her father became taciturn, as he often did, she knew how to rouse him from his moody thoughts, by starting some subject pertaining to his own pursuits, and whenever a hitch occurred—some point of difference between host and guest, such as, from the total dissimilarity of their characters, could not at times but arise—she smoothed it away with some graceful jest. It was not without some secret sense of disloyalty that Walter found himself comparing the two sisters with one another, to the disadvantage of the absent one. Lotty had certainly never exhibited such tact and graciousness, but in her case there had been no such opportunity for their display; she had had no judgments to pass, no opinions to offer, no feelings

even to express, except with respect to one person and one object. Perhaps when Lilian came to be in love her thoughts would also be enclosed in the same narrow circle. Since they were so broad and comprehensive, it was probable that she was not in love, and that was somehow a very pleasant reflection to Walter. We have all experienced, I suppose—we men—in our time, a satisfaction at feeling confident that the charming young person by whom we are seated for an hour or so, even if we are never to see her again, is for the present fancy free; that she can feel an interest in what we say, if not in ourselves; that she has thoughts, which she can interchange with us, of her very own; that she is not as yet absorbed, as young ladies sooner or later become, in the individuality of some one of the opposite sex, not at all likely (taking the average of male creatures) to be in any way superior to ourselves. In Walter's case, the consciousness that there was a secret between Lilian and himself gave intensity to this pleasure, yet no one will surely venture to assert that he had fallen in love with his young hostess. The

recollection of the circumstances that had admitted him to her presence, must alone have been sufficient to preserve him from such folly; he was poorer even than his friend the captain; his future was even still less promising; and after the experience of his host's conduct towards her whom Lilian had herself described as his favourite daughter, what hope could there be of Mr. Brown's looking with favour—nay, with patience—at the pretensions of such a suitor as Mr. Walter Litton! At all events Mr. Christopher Brown, who was said to be worth a plum, the fruit too of his own planting, and who had a great character for good judgment in the City, was evidently of the opinion that no such maggot could have entered into the young guest's brain, as will be seen from a certain proposition he made to him after dinner.

That period "across the walnuts and the wine" had been looked forward to by Walter with some dismay; he would have liked to have gone at once into the drawing-room, and listened to Lilian's playing on the piano, a little nearer than at the distance it now came to him through the wall; or, if

that might not have been, even to have left Willowbank at once, and finished the evening with his friend Jack over the fragrant pipe. He felt that wealth was not the only thing that he had not in common with this friendly Croesus, and that an "unpleasant quarter of an hour," and perhaps a good deal more—for his host had ordered spirits-and-water for himself—was in store for him. If he would only talk of Lotty, then indeed he would try his very best to do her some service; but that he should choose such a topic to converse on with an utter stranger, seemed to the last degree improbable. It was to his great relief therefore that so soon as the young lady had withdrawn, his host observed: "You smoke, of course?" for tobacco, amongst its other priceless benefits, confers the advantage of silence without embarrassment. "There are some cigars, young gentleman, such as you have seldom tasted," added the old man, as the box was handed round; "they cost me three guineas a pound, though I imported them myself."

• "They are excellent, no doubt, sir; but I hope you will not feel aggrieved if I take a

pipe instead: I am accustomed to pipes, and do not wish to acquire extravagant habits."

Walter said this in joke, since, as a matter of fact, he greatly preferred a pipe to a cigar, but his companion took him *au pied de la lettre*.

"That shows you are a very sensible young fellow," said he approvingly. "I did not take to smoking myself till I was long past your age, because I couldn't afford it; and I would have smoked pipes if they had agreed with me. As it was, I smoked cheroots. Can you guess why?"

"Well, no, sir; these things are so much a matter of fancy."

"I never do anything from fancy, Mr. Litton, and I never did. I smoked cheroots, partly because they were cheaper, partly because I hated the extravagance of biting off the end of a cigar and throwing it away. The wasting of that end was a positive wickedness in my eyes—a mere wanton sacrifice to the caprices of fashion."

"I see," said Walter, amused at his host's devotion to principle in such a matter; "and I suppose you put the small end of

the cheroot in your mouth instead of the big end?"

"Most certainly I did," returned his companion seriously: "a man who does otherwise is, in my opinion, a mere wasteful puppy."

"But they say it draws better."

"That's rubbish," interrupted the other; "a transparent device of the manufacturer, to cause a greater consumption of the material he supplies. Why, you ought to know that, since you know so much about 'drawing,' eh?"—and the old gentleman stirred his toddy, and expressed that species of satisfaction peculiar to persons who do not often make jokes, but when they do, flatter themselves that they are successful.

Walter laughed, as in duty bound, and said it was very polite in Mr. Brown to give him credit for knowledge in his calling.

"Not at all, sir; I never pay compliments," said his host. "I know something about your 'art,' as you painters are so fond of calling it, though I have paid for it pretty dearly. There is more than a thousand pounds 'locked up,' as I call it, in this house

—the interest of money that I have spent in pictures. It is not a bad investment in these days, to those who can stand the immediate loss. O yes, you can draw and paint too, Mr. Litton. Now, with respect to this picture ‘Supplication’”—here his voice became suddenly grave and earnest —“did it take you long?”

“Well, yes, sir; many months. But it need not have done so, had I not lingered over it: one does, you know, over work that pleases one.”

“Just so; I have done it myself,” answered the other thoughtfully, “many and many a day, when all the other clerks had left, have I sat at my desk conning over every figure; but your figures are very different, eh?”

The old gentleman’s tone was still jocose, yet it was evident from his manner that he was upon a topic that had a serious interest for him.

“Did you paint this picture from—from the life?”

“I did, sir; that is, a model sat to me for it.”

“A model? Do you mean a young lady?”

asked Mr. Brown in a voice that in its eager curiosity was almost anxious.

“Yes; a young woman sat for the picture; it was originally intended to be a portion of an historical work: I painted her as Queen Philippa beseeching her husband to spare the citizens of Calais: only there is no King Edward, and no citizens.”

“Ah, indeed.” Then, after a pause: “You recognised the likeness to my daughter Lilian, I perceived?”

“Well, yes, sir.”

“And yet you never saw her before, I suppose?”

“Never to my knowledge.”

“Well, I should like another portrait of her, this time taken from the life, but treated in the same style, so as to make as it were a companion picture. Is there not some one in history—some girl—who had no necessity to plead for pardon, either for herself or others; one whose character was faithful, dutiful, unselfish, like my Lilian?”

“There is Joan of Arc, sir,” reflected Walter; “a hackneyed subject, it is true; but so far, for that matter, is Philippa. I could paint your daughter in that character:

faithful, dutiful, helpful for others, cheerful, in spite of adverse fate; but it would put the young lady to some inconvenience; these historical subjects take more time than ordinary portraits."

"I see. But can you not, as in the other case, get some one else to sit in the proper costume and so forth—the same, perhaps, as sat before—and then, for the features and expression, paint from my daughter herself?"

"That is possible, sir; but I cannot promise to produce so good a likeness as in the first instance, where I had no original before me. These chance successes are difficult to repeat. There is an old story of a painter who could not paint a cloud to his liking, and in his irritation threw the brush at the canvas, which made by accident the very effect he wished to produce; but if he had thrown the brush a second time it would probably not have made a second cloud. I will do my best, however."

"No man can do more, sir. We will consider that as settled, and I will give you the three hundred pounds for the Joan which you refused for the Philippa. Yes,

yes ; I must have my own way this time ; and Lilian will sit to you when you wish."

"Under the circumstances, I shall not need to trouble her for some time ; the preliminary work will take——"

"Well, well, begin it at once, that's all," interrupted his host impatiently. "You gentlemen of the brush are rather slow in your movements ; it is the same with the other sort of painters, whom one can never get out of the house. Now I suppose I shall not be able to get this Philippa picture till the autumn, shall I?"

"Not till after the Academy is closed. No, sir ; I fear not."

"Well, that's a great injustice. When a picture is bought and paid for, one ought to do what one likes with it ; that's my notion of property."

"But consider, sir, if everybody acted upon that idea, what blank spaces there would be on the walls before the Exhibition was over !"

"Pooh, pooh ; let them paint the walls."

It was clear the old gentleman was getting irritable. Up to this point Walter

felt that he had made a favourable impression, and much as he wished to see Lilian again that evening, he feared this impression might be marred by his delaying longer at Willowbank. The gout was evidently beginning to trouble his host, and there were indications in his manner which showed he was growing impatient of the presence of his young guest.

“Well, if you will allow me, Mr. Brown, I will set about this affair of your daughter’s picture—since you seem to be in a hurry for it—at once; it is still early, so that I may, perhaps, this very evening secure the services of my model for to-morrow.”

“An excellent thought, Mr. Litton,” returned the old gentleman with an eagerness that showed how accurately his guest had read his wishes. “I like to see a young man prompt in business. My daughter is also my nurse, and just now I require her services for this hand of mine; so perhaps you will excuse her entertaining you in the drawing-room. I will make your compliments to her for you; and do you drop me a line when you are ready to paint her. Good-bye, sir, good-bye.” And in five minutes Walter found

himself on the other side of the lodge-gate, and in the world of London.

The events of the last few hours seemed to him like a dream, and yet the result of them had been very material. He had a cheque for a hundred pounds in his pocket, and had obtained a commission which would bring him in three hundred more. But this was the least part of what had happened to him. He was conscious of a complete revolution in his own feelings. He adored Lotty still with the same honest devotion as of old; his interest in her was just as great, and his desire to help her had even become active instead of passive; but there was not the same sense of hopelessness within him as he had experienced heretofore. He had not transferred his allegiance to her sister; he was loyal as ever to her cause; but he felt, for the first time, that his allegiance might be due elsewhere than to Lotty. His position was somewhat analogous to that of a wavering Jacobite, who could own a king *de facto* as well as a king *de jure*. What astonished him most was, that he felt no regret that he had sold his picture; he endeavoured to account for

this by the reflection that it was passing into the hands, not of strangers, but of those who had a greater right to it than himself; but what undoubtedly more compensated him for its loss, was the fact that he was about to paint its companion portrait from the life; that he must needs spend days, perhaps weeks, at Willowbank with Lotty's sister, and so in a manner would have the original beside him to console him for the absence of the copy.

The first step to be taken was to seek out little Red Riding-hood, and to covenant with her for certain sittings which were to be commenced forthwith; and to this end he bent his way towards her humble dwelling. It was a mere business affair to him—just as buying stock would have been to Mr. Christopher Brown—and the only consideration that he had in his mind was, what increase should be made in Miss Nellie Neale's rate of pay for her services—which should in some measure reflect his own good fortune, and yet not spoil the market? The romance of that eventful afternoon, however, was by no means over for him yet.



CHAPTER XIV.

NELLIE'S LOVER.

THE private residence of Mr. Neale, as distinguished from his professional abode at the corner of Beech Street (which was in fact a cellar, though it was called a stall), was quite a palatial dwelling, if he had occupied the whole of the premises himself; but of the five rooms of which the house was composed, he let out two to lodgers, and therefore the parlour on his ground-floor was not dedicated solely to the reception of visitors; it was the dining-room, and also the kitchen, whereby, let us hope, that great desideratum, heat, was always insured for his mutton-chops, and the plates that they were served upon. But Mr. Neale, it is to be feared, did not often rejoice in mutton-chops; it

was a dish that very, very rarely was tasted, or even smelt, by the inhabitants of Little Grime Street, in which he lived. The day on which there was bacon enough for himself and his four children, including Nellie, who was the only one grown up, was a feast-day with the family, and one which he would have marked with a white stone, if he had known how to do it. There was some sort of cookery, however, in progress when Mr. Walter Litton looked in, sufficient at all events to call forth the apologies of the cobbler, who was himself superintending it; while his three little girls were arranging the supper-table, quite in the Russian fashion, with a lettuce of the size of a parasol, and some remarkably fine onions.

"It is not for you to apologize, but for me, Mr. Neale, for having intruded on your supper-hour," said Walter, patting the curly head of the smallest girl. "Why, your board looks like Covent Garden, little missis."

"Well, yes, sir," answered the cobbler, stirring the vessel on the fire with a large iron spoon; "when meat is scarce, we makes it up with vegetables; they are

always wholesome, and they're very filling. Wont you take a chair, Mr. Litton?"

The cobbler was a great favourite of Walter's, and the regard was reciprocal. The worthy man had long lost his wife, and had had a hard time of it in endeavouring to bring up his four girls in comfort and respectability; he was obliged to be much away from home, nor had he been able to afford to hire any one to look after them in his absence; but they were good girls, he said, "though he said it who shouldn't say it;" and the elder ones had "seen to" their juniors, and when nine years old were better housekeepers than many young ladies are found to be who marry at nineteen. He had a hearty cheerful face, not at all handsome, but with an honest pride in it; and though his locks were grizzled, he looked as though there was happiness for him yet, such as a man generally contrives to find who works for others and does his duty by them.

"Where's Nellie?" inquired Walter, "that you are doing the cooking, Mr. Neale?"

"Well, it's only tripe, sir," answered the

cobbler ; "and she knows I'm equal to that. She'll be home in a minute or two ; indeed, I thought it was her when you came in."

"It's rather late for her to be out, is it not?" said Walter.

"Well, no, sir ; not this beautiful summer weather : the cool air does her good, and I ain't afraid of her getting harm in other ways, thank God ! Nellie's a good girl, if ever there was one. But she ain't well, sir. Perhaps you haven't noticed it, but the last few days she has seemed to me more white and spiritlesslike, and she's been ailing off and on ever since the spring."

"I have not seen any change in her of late at all," said Walter gravely.

"I daresay not, sir ; but then, you see, you're not her father. Not but that you have behaved as kind and honest to her as though you were, Mr. Litton. I have reason to be thankful to you on many accounts, Heaven knows ! You're having her to sit for you so constant is a great help to us, though I wish it would be in the mornings, as it used to be, and not so late in the day. By the time you have done

with her, and she has made her little purchases for the house, it's getting on for bedtime, and I scarcely see anything of her now."

"I wish her to come in the mornings," said Walter quietly; "that will suit me better, as it happens, for the future. Will you ask her to come in to-morrow at the old time, instead of the afternoon? She will understand if you just say that."

"I will tell her, sir, and with great pleasure."

"Yes; but don't tell her that I called, Mr. Neale; say I sent round a message, will you? I have a reason for it."

"A reason for it?" said the cobbler. "Deary me! She has not offended you, I hope?"

"Not at all. The fact is, I have some news for her; and I wish to tell it her myself. I have just sold the picture for which she sat for a good sum, and I think I can afford her a little better pay."

"Indeed, sir, you are very good. Why, it is only the other day—not a month ago—that you increased it. She has been even able to save some money to give herself a

few days at the seaside next month, which we are in hopes will do her good."

"Indeed," said Walter dryly. "Well, just give her my card, with these few words on it, and don't say a word—nor let her sisters say one—of my having called here."

The old cobbler promised readily ; and the little girls, delighted at the surprise that was awaiting their sister on the morrow, and the nature of which they thoroughly appreciated, promised also. Indeed, as Walter quitted that humble roof he left the whole family radiant. But the smile faded off his own lips so soon as he had shut the door behind him. Had poor little Red Riding-hood gone to the bad ? was his first thought ; and the conviction that it was so gave him the sincerest sorrow. He was frank and simple in character, but it was not through ignorance of the ways of the world, and especially of the London world. Directly the old cobbler had said : "Perhaps you haven't noticed it, but the last few days Nellie has looked white and spiritless," he had at once grasped the fact that she was deceiving her father, and making a pretended engagement in his studio an excuse

for her absence from home. He had not himself set eyes on the girl for seven weeks. Most persons in his place would at once have blurted out the truth, but he had not had the heart—that is the hardness of heart—to do so. Any time would be time enough to tell the poor old man of his daughter's shame, if she had stooped to shame; and it might be possible to spare him even yet. If Nellie knew that he had called in person, she would conclude that he had discovered her deceit, and would perhaps have refused to come to Beech Street. His common-sense told him that in such a case there was extremedanger of precipitating a catastrophe: many a girl on the road to ruin has been hurried on to that fatal goal by the reproaches of those who have taken it for granted that it has been already reached. That it had been reached by poor Nellie, Walter had only too much cause to fear. That she had taken money from some one, pretending that it was her earnings in Beech Street, was a bad sign indeed; while that talk of a few days at the sea seemed to point only too surely to her intention of leaving home at no distant date with her

betrayed. But until he was certain of this he resolved to shield Red Riding-hood not only from evil to come, if that might be possible, but also from reproach for what had passed; and to conceal what he had learnt even from his friend Pelter, though Jack himself had shown a kind interest in Nellie. It was not so much far-sighted prudence—the reflection that a girl's good name once spoken against is not to be lightly cleared, even from groundless scandal—as sheer tenderness of heart, that actuated Walter in this matter, and which was at once his strength and his weakness. If it had caused him to “philander” with a married woman, it also kept his lips sealed as with the seal of confession with respect to the frailties of a single one. He had plenty to tell Jack (though he by no means told him all) with reference to his visit to Willowbank, without touching on any other subject, and they sat up together half the night discoursing upon it. Jack thought Mr. Christopher Brown ought to have come down more handsomely in the case of Philippa (for Walter had not told him how he had been tempted by “advances,” and

refused them, and given way in the end to sentiment): "A hundred pounds is far too little to have taken from so big a fish as Mr. Brown; but, on the other hand, he will be punished for his parsimony by giving three hundred for your next picture, which wont be half so good. No, sir. Mark my words: Joan will be comparatively a failure. The inspiration will now be wanting, unless, indeed, you happen to take a fancy to this young lady in duplicate." Walter smiled what he flattered himself was a smile of sadness. "Well, my lad, that is as it may be. I have known a heart, dead and buried as it were in barren ground, dug up, and going again very wholesomely, before now. At all events, your material prospects have now become very flourishing indeed, and I congratulate you upon them most heartily. There will be lots of work to do at that house. You will have to paint the old gentleman himself——"

"In lamp-black," suggested Walter.

"No, no; I mean Mr. Brown. You must make him very solid and irrefragable; his cheque-book lying before him upon that plain desk, which you may depend upon it

was the one he used when he had but fifty pounds a year and the reversion of his employer's boots. It has the same interest for him, I don't doubt, as Sir Isaac Newton's first arithmetic book, or Nelson's earliest toy-ship, would have for the public. He is one of the great professors of the art of getting money, and understands it thoroughly; but he knows nothing about how to spend it, and you must teach it him. Point out the desirability of his having frescoes upon the staircase walls, and when you have convinced him give him my card. 'Orders executed for frescoes with punctuality and despatch,' shall be printed upon it, expressly to 'fetch' him. I shall rise with you, Watty—I feel it—up that staircase. Let us embrace. Let us drink the health of 'Christie Brown'—it sounds quite poetical. There is Christie Johnson, gone, poor thing; and Christie somebody else, I don't know which, but it haunts me. Oh, it's the auctioneer. Well, he's always 'going,' and that's sad too. Bless you, Watty; you are enriched, and yet you are affable!"

From the style of which discourse, it

may be gathered that Mr. John Pelter had been wishing luck to his friend for a considerable time, and was rather overcome by his feelings, and what he had mixed with them.

"You'll set to work at once, Watty, of course," were his farewell words. "I wont keep you up. Early to bed and early to rise, is the way to get—screwed, yes, *very* screwed, by Jove! But you *will* set to work at once, for my sake?"

"Yes, yes. Nellie Neale is coming to-morrow morning to sit for the Joan. Good night, Jack; good night." And Jack took himself off with difficulty, stopping more than once upon the stairs to wink at the moon, which was shining very brightly, and to remark that, though so rich, she was affable.

For once Walter did not bewail the weakness to which his friend had given way, for whenever he so committed himself he was certain to be late on the ensuing morning, and he did not wish him to see Nellie.

He had little hope that Red Riding-hood would sit as his model any more, and if

that should happen it was better that she should come and go without the observation of a third person. It had seemed easy for him, when in Little Grime Street, in presence of her father and sisters, to administer reproof to Red Riding-hood, and to warn her against a course of conduct which must needs bring shame upon them all ; but in his own bachelor apartments, as the hour drew near for him to play the part of Mentor, he became conscious of his personal unfitness for that rôle, and almost regretted that he had not left her misconduct to be dealt with by her natural guardian and protector. However, it was too late now for retreat, and he had to screw his courage up as best he might ; only he could not help wishing that he was the clergyman of the parish, or at all events the father of a family. Nellie was always punctual, and at the appointed hour he heard her ring at the door, her well-known step upon the stairs : if he had not heard them, he would hardly have recognised her when she entered. She was as pretty as ever, indeed, perhaps prettier, for loss of colour does not detract from your dark beauties ; but she

looked very pale, and worn and thin; the brightness that had once lit up her face on bidding him good morning was exchanged for a spasmodic smile, which passed away with her salutation, and even before it—"went out," as it were, leaving the fair face blank and desolate. She was no more Little Red Riding-hood, but had grown up to find that there were wolves in the world under a more attractive guise than even one's grandmother. Her dress was always neat, but he noticed that it was made of better material than heretofore.

"My father told me, Mr. Litton, that you had sent last night——"

"I called myself," interrupted Walter quietly, "and saw your father. Take a chair, Nellie."

She was very glad to do so, as he saw, for she trembled from head to foot.

"I—I didn't understand that you had been there yourself, sir."

"Yes; I wished to see you about sitting for another picture."

"Thank you, sir; but I don't think I can do that at present," answered Nellie quickly.

“And why not?” inquired Walter, looking as much like the clergyman of the parish, or at all events the curate, as he could, and adopting a tone such as he considered suitable to ecclesiastical cross-examination.

“Well, Mr. Litton, I have my hands full of other business. There’s father and the girls——”

“Nay; your hands are not full of *them*, Nellie.”

Her attempt at duplicity gave him confidence, for he had a natural hatred of and indignation against lies. “It is no use your pretending that to me, though you may deceive *them* by a story of your being engaged in my studio every afternoon. Suppose I had said to your father, ‘She has not been there for these seven weeks,’ as perhaps I ought to have said?”

Nellie answered not a word, but sat with her eyes, with tears creeping slowly out of them, fast fixed on the ground.

“It is not my place, Nellie, but your father’s place, to be talking to you about the manner in which you spend your time. But I do so to spare him, and, if it be possible, to save yourself.”

Her pale face flushed in a moment, and she sprang to her feet. "What do you mean by that, Mr. Litton?" cried she, confronting him. "You have no right to say such words."

"As your friend and your father's friend, Nellie, I have a right; nor do I use them without good cause, or at least what seems so. When a young girl in your position—I don't speak of it disdainfully, Heaven knows!" for she had uttered an ejaculation of what he took to be wounded pride: "the case would be most serious for any young lady who should act thus; but in your case it is most dangerous—I say, when a girl absents herself for hours daily from her father's roof, and is so ashamed of her occupation during that period as to conceal it from him, nay, to trump up a false story, in order to account for her absence, there is good ground to suppose that she requires to be saved—from herself, at least. If you have a lover, why should you be ashamed to confess it at home, if he is an honest man?"

"He is a gentleman," said Nellie proudly.

"I am sorry to hear it," was Walter's

dry reply ; "for in that case, under the circumstances, it is still more likely that he is not honest."

"You do not flatter him, nor me, sir," answered Nellie bitterly.

"I don't wish to flatter you ; I wish to tell you the truth. If this man pretends that he loves you, but bids you keep his love a secret from your friends, he is lying ! Do you suppose that it is you alone who can deceive people by specious stories ? I dare say he has the best of reasons—private ones, but such as you will understand, he says—for not marrying you just at present. In the meantime, he gives you money——"

"You are very, very cruel !" interrupted Nelly, crying bitterly. "You misjudge him altogether."

"Still, he does what I have said," answered Walter drily.

"And if he does, he has a reason for it. His family is a very high one. But there ! it is no use saying anything to you, and you have no right to say anything to me !"

And with that she turned as if to go. There was a look of excited resolve in her face which did not escape Walter's eyes ; he

stepped between her and the door, and locked it. "You shall not go to that man to-day," said he; "I will send round to your father at his stall, and he shall take you home."

"O no, no, no!" pleaded the girl, falling on her knees. "Oh, do not tell my father!"

"I will, so help me Heaven, Nellie, unless you tell me who this man is. If he is not a scoundrel, there can be no harm in my satisfying myself upon that point. If he is——"

"Oh, Mr. Litton, he is no scoundrel; he is a gentleman like yourself; only he does not wish folks to know about it. In a few days I shall be his; he has promised it; but in the meantime I was to tell nobody, and you least of all."

"*Me!* What! Do I know the man?"

"O yes; he is a friend of yours; I met him—that is, he saw me here for the first time. It is Captain Selwyn. But he will be so very, very angry if he knew I told you his secret: on my knees, I beg of you not to reveal——"

"Kneel to God, and not to me, Nellie!" said Walter, in hoarse but solemn tones,

“and thank Him that you have told me in time to save you from ruin. Captain Selwyn is a married man ; I saw him married with my own eyes, not a year ago, in Cornwall.”

“Married !” echoed Nellie, and fell forward on the floor, as though she had been a lay figure, and no model. She had fainted away.





CHAPTER XV.

COMING ROUND.



ALTER LITTON was neither a Puritan nor a Saint ; his nature was too genial to have permitted himself to be either ; he thought many things venial which morality would stigmatize as vicious. But seduction was not in his eyes, as so many men profess to regard it, an impossibility, and he held it to be infamous and cruel. In the case of a married man, he justly considered it to be especially criminal ; and if Nellie and her would-be betrayer had both been strangers to him, he would have pitied the one and abhorred the other. But as it was, he had never felt such anger against any human being as he did now against Reginald Selwyn ; partly because he had tried to ruin Little Red Riding-hood,

who in simplicity was almost as the child of the nursery legend after which she had been called; and partly because he was Lotty's husband. With this last fact it was not his business perhaps to have concerned himself; yet the reflection that the captain was not even faithful to that tender flower that he had transplanted from its home garden, and which was fading in sunless poverty for his sake, moved Walter most of all. If he could have learned where the man was to be found, he would not have hesitated to let him know his opinion of him; but this information Nellie resolutely refused to give. "I shall see him once," said she, "to give him back his presents; but never again. And there is no occasion for you to quarrel with him on my account." She seemed thoroughly to understand that he was a scoundrel, though her words of reprobation were few. "It was very false and cruel of him," she sobbed, when Walter had "brought her round" with a little cold water. "I thought he was telling me the truth, Mr. Litton, because I knew he was a friend of yours."

"He will never be a friend of mine again,"

said Walter bitterly. "He is a liar and a coward!"

"But I have been a liar too," said she; "and very, very wicked. O, sir! what do I not owe to you for having——"

"There, there: don't say a word of that; but strive to make up to them at home for the wrong you have done them. You have had a narrow escape, Red Riding-hood, and it should be a warning to you as long as you live. The next time a man professes love for you, and you reciprocate it——"

Nellie shook her pretty head, and sobbed out: "Never, never! that is all over now. And please don't call me Red Riding-hood any more; I don't deserve it."

"Well, well; I only say, if such a thing *should* happen, don't keep it from your father. No good ever came from hiding such a thing yet. As to this man Selwyn, you have only to tell him from me——"

"I shall tell him nothing from you, sir; I have done mischief enough between you already," answered she firmly.

"But you will not let him persuade you that he is not married?"

"O no, no, sir!" and she gave a little

shudder of loathing, which Walter rightly considered to be more assuring than any protestations.

"And now, not this morning, but to-morrow, you will come and sit to me as usual; and we will be grandmamma and little Red Riding-hood together, just as we used to be."

"I will come and sit to you, sir," said Nellie humbly, and with a significant ignoring of his last sentence, which was very pitiful.

And the next morning, Nellie came as usual, pale enough, but not with those fever-bright eyes and haggard looks that she had worn on the previous day.

"Tell me truly, is it all over between you and that man?" asked Walter; but he scarcely needed her earnest assurance that it was so, to convince him that she was not only out of danger, but cured. Anything short of the actual cautery—the use of these scathing words, "I saw him married with my own eyes," which Litton had fortunately been able to pronounce, would probably have failed to eradicate the honeyed poison of the treacherous captain; but as it was,

she was saved. The shock of the operation had, however, been severe, and the poor girl suffered sadly on her road to convalescence. It was well for her that, besides her duties at home, she had once more her own employment to occupy her thoughts ; and it was also well to be in the company of the friendly artist, whose presence could not but remind her of the peril which, thanks to him, she had escaped.

Walter worked hard at his new picture, but it was a relief to him that for the present he could do so at home. If he had had at at once to present himself at his patron's house while his wrath was at white-heat against the captain, it would have been difficult for him to discourse of his former ally to Lilian without her seeing that his regard for him had evaporated. For the present he had not only no forgiveness for him, but not common patience—which means common charity. It was only after many days, and by accusing himself (not without justice) of being so furious against his friend, not because he was a married man, but because he had married Lotty, that he was able to look upon his offence with calmer eyes. There

was this to be said, however (and though it made little difference in the moral aspect of the question, it had a very mitigating effect on Walter), no harm had been done after all; and when the time arrived for him to revisit Willowbank he felt that he could plead for the exiled pair, if his pleading might be of any service, almost as honestly as though the captain had not been one of them. He found Mr. Brown in much better case than on his first visit; the gout had left him, and with it much of his peevishness and irritability; while Lilian was looking more beautiful than ever.

He had chosen an upper room for his studio, into which his host bustled cheerily in and out, but kept no dragon's watch over him. Upon the first opportunity of their being alone together, Walter congratulated his sitter upon her more cheerful looks, which he attributed to the improvement in her father's health.

"You are more like Joan in her halcyon days than when I saw you last," said he.

"You mean to say that I don't look so much as though I had been condemned for

a witch, Mr. Litton," answered she, smiling. "Well, you will be glad to hear there is a good reason for that."

"I see one reason in your father's recovery."

"Yes; and there is another, which has also, as I believe, been the cause of his convalescence. There is now a well-grounded hope that he will be reconciled with my sister and her husband."

"I am delighted to hear it," said Walter. "May I learn how that has come about?"

"Well, partly, if not chiefly (as I shall take care to tell them both) through that picture of yours in the Academy. I don't think a day has passed without my father's having paid a visit there on his way home from the City. He excuses himself upon the ground that the Philippa is his property, and that therefore he feels an interest in it. But I know that he has a better reason than that. Since, for the present, he cannot see Lotty, he solaces himself with that 'counterfeit presentment' of her."

"But he can see her if he chooses, I suppose?"

"Yes; but there are certain outworks of

pride to be broken down before he can permit himself to be persuaded out of what was once a very obstinate resolution. That they are gradually giving way, however, I am certain. A letter came to him lately from Mrs. Sheldon—Captain Selwyn's aunt, you know."

"Yes, yes ; I know her very well. But I am surprised at her arguments having such an effect, since she was the means—that is, since it was from her house that your sister was married."

"Very true ; but her husband has lately died, and she has written in great sorrow, wishing to be at peace, she says, with all her fellow-creatures, and lamenting the involuntary part she took in separating father and child. You look incredulous, Mr. Litton."

"Do I ? I did not mean to do so ; though certainly I should not have credited Mrs. Sheldon with such sentiments. But, again, I should have thought your father to be one of the last men in the world likely to be moved by them—that is, of course, from any source which might cause him to suspect their authenticity."

“That is true enough,” answered Lilian ; “but Mrs. Sheldon’s communication, it seems (for I have not seen it with my own eyes), also informed him that there was some improvement in Captain Selwyn’s prospects. A distant cousin of his has died——”

“If it is the Irish cousin, then Selwyn is Sir Reginald,” exclaimed Walter.

“I have heard nothing of that. He gains little advantage, however, I am told, in income ; but such as it is it makes the marriage less unequal in point of fortune ; or rather dear papa is willing to persuade himself so, which is the main point. If he can only be persuaded to forgive Lotty, she and her husband could both come and live at Willowbank, you know, and we should be *so* happy together. Then you would always find your friend here, Mr. Litton, even if papa should be out, to talk over old times. You look as if there was some doubt of that.”

“I must have a very incredulous countenance,” observed Walter, smiling.

“You have a very decipherable one, and I think I read it aright. Pray forgive me for cross-examining you so particularly, Mr.

Litton; but this matter is to me of the most vital importance. You know Captain Selwyn's character much better than I do. Do you think it impossible, from your knowledge of him, that he would be persuaded to live here?"

"Indeed, I do not. On the contrary, if he has received no accession of income, I do not see how he is well to live anywhere else."

"But I am so afraid that papa and he may not get on well together; they are so different, you know, in their habits; at least I should suppose so from all I have heard of my brother-in-law."

"I think that would be of little consequence," answered Walter; "there would on that very account be less cause for antagonism between them. But in such a case Selwyn having 'sold out' would, of course, become an idle man, and at his age that is seldom desirable."

If Walter Litton's face had been as decipherable as Lilian had described it, and if she had had the key of the cipher, it might have told sad tales. He did not think that plan of Selwyn's living idle at

Willowbank would be at all conducive to his wife's happiness; but he could not say so, nor even hint at it.

"Oh, but papa could give him something to do; he has often talked, for example, of getting some one he could trust to superintend his affairs for him; and don't you think——"

But here Mr. Brown himself happened to look in, which preserved Walter from the necessity of having to say what he thought of making an ex-captain of Her Majesty's dragoons, who had not at present been remarkable for his business habits, into an estate and property agent. And the subject was not afterwards resumed by Lilian. She was never tired, however, of talking about Lotty, whose return to her home was evidently her one absorbing thought. Not a taint of jealousy, of fear lest she should once more become her father's favourite, and oust herself from the place which in her absence she had occupied, tinged her sisterly love. She had plenty of conversation upon all topics, for she had read and thought much more than most girls of her age, and indeed much more than Walter.

himself; but this homespun talk of hers pleased him most—not only because it concerned Lotty. Her every word seemed to give assurance of the simplicity and unselfishness that dictated it. In some superficial respects she was inferior to her sister. She had not so much of what her sex term “style.” She lacked that air of conscious superiority, born of wealth and beauty, which he had noticed in Lotty when he first met her; but she had the same gentle graciousness of look and manner, and twice the wits. It was shocking, as he admitted to himself, to be making so odious a comparison. If he had been interrogated a month ago about Lotty’s intelligence he would have pronounced it perfect; the fact being that her external charms had been so all-sufficient for him, that he had not looked beyond them; but now he confessed that Lilian was greatly her superior: she had more sense, more feeling, more principle. This was really very hard upon Lotty; but then everything was allowable, or at all events excusable, because of this last advantage that Lilian certainly did possess—her thoughts were not entirely monopolized.

by a beloved object (male). He did not mind their dwelling upon Lotty—far from it—but I think Mr. Walter Litton would have privately resented it had they dwelt upon another Reginald Selwyn. As for having fallen in love with her himself, however, I have already stated what a sensible young man he was, and how ridiculous, impossible, and futile any such notion must have appeared to him; indeed he was continually repeating to himself a hundred arguments against his committing such a piece of folly, from which we may conclude how safe and sound he felt. If this had not been the case he would have been placed in quite a dangerous position at Willowbank, for Mr. Christopher Brown, as I have said, left him a good deal alone with Lilian in the painting-room; and the depicting a very beautiful young lady as Joan of Arc affords rather exceptional opportunities for falling in love with her, which a less prudent young gentleman would have found it hard to put away from him. This conduct of his host was caused by his complete confidence in Lilian's character and dutifulness, and not at all from the

reflection that she would surely take warning from her sister's fate. He considered Lotty's fiasco in the light of an unparalleled misadventure, which could not possibly happen twice in a respectable family; and perhaps even drew some comfort from its occurrence on that very ground, just as some folks flatter themselves that travelling by rail is all the safer because an accident has taken place on the same line the previous day. At all events Mr. Brown was not only civil to the young painter, but even, so far as his nature permitted him to be, cordial and friendly. He was confidential to him also after dinner; as Walter thought, extremely confidential; but then he did not know that upon one particular topic (and one only) Mr. Christopher Brown was prone to be confidential to everybody; this was upon his own personal history and rise in the world, which he was wont to relate in a didactic manner for the edification of any one he could get to listen to him. How he had begun his financial career by earning pennies for skidding the wheels of omnibuses on Holborn Hill, which was in reality a flight of imagination;

though he had told it so often that he had actually begun to think that such was the case. He had been employed, when quite a lad, by the omnibus company, on account of his trustworthiness as a timekeeper, and had occasionally put his shoulder, or at all events his hand, to a wheel. But it was Mr. Brown's weakness to disparage beginnings, as it is that of others to magnify theirs, in order by contrast to make the present, which he had finally achieved, the more magnificent. "I used to earn pennies, sir—that is, when I was fortunate enough to get a penny for my trouble, instead of a halfpenny—by skidding wheels in Holborn Hill. But while they *descended*, I *ascended*; while I put the drag on in their case, I accelerated my own motion towards independence. The pennies became shillings, and, begad! I looked at a shilling more than the proverbial number of times in those days, let me tell you, before I parted with it; and then the shillings became pounds. I never got a hundred pounds in a lump, young man, and far less three hundred" (this was in delicate allusion to the price agreed upon for Joan of Arc)

“when I was your age ; but what I did get I saved, and put out to the best advantage. I had only two friends in all the world, sir, at that time, Diligence and Economy ; but they stuck to me, and by their help I won the fight.”

Mr. Brown might have added that his too devoted allegiance to them “at that time” had prevented his making friends of a human sort till it was too late to make them. If it had not been for his marriage, which, to his honour, was one of affection, he would have had nobody upon whose unselfish attachment he could have counted for the smallest service, from those early days on Holborn Hill up to the present date. His wife had died ; and one of his daughters, as we have seen, had undutifully deserted him, so that he had but faithful Lilian left. She was a great treasure, it is true, yet only too likely to pass into other hands. It was no wonder that he reckoned that wealth at a high value which was his only consolation for the absence of friendly faces, loving hands, and for the sake of which he had foregone them. Walter

pitied, and strove not to despise him, while he quoted his shallow laws about getting and saving, as though they were Holy Writ, and boasted of his growing fortunes. The old man thought him entranced with wonder, and indeed he was so — with wonder how, from such a crabbed stock, two such dainty blossoms as Lilian and her sister could have sprung. And yet Christopher Brown had his good points about him, to which his young guest was by no means blind. He was really a man of strict integrity, notwithstanding that he plumed himself so on its possession; nor was he mean, though he was cautious in spending the wealth which he had so drudgingly acquired. “I can do as ‘smart’ a thing” (by which he meant as liberal a one) “as any man, when I think fit,” he would sometimes say; and therein (though he did not often think fit) he spoke no more than the truth. On that first day Mr. Brown confined his private conversation with his guest almost entirely to the topic of his own success in the world; nor did he say one syllable which would have led him to

imagine, had he not been aware of the fact, that he had another daughter beside Lilian. And yet there was one circumstance which, in Walter's eyes—which were sharp enough in drawing a deduction—had a significant reference to Lotty's marriage. After dinner they had adjourned for smoking to an apartment which was evidently the business sanctum of the master of the house: a room in which there was no furniture of the ornamental kind, and not a single book, except one bulky one which happened to be lying on the table. This was the "Peerage and Baronetage of the United Kingdom." Walter was far too much a man of the world to be surprised at seeing such a volume in such a place; he knew that your "self-made man" is by no means disinclined to worship at the shrine of those who, unlike himself, are indebted for their making to their ancestors; and he took it up carelessly enough. He was not a little struck, however, by its opening at a particular page, the leaf of which was turned down, so as to point with its edge to the name of Selwyn. "Selwyn, Sir Richard,"

he read, "fifth baronet; Donaghadee, Ireland, and Long's Hotel, Bond Street. Unmarried. *Heir Presumptive, Reginald Selwyn, Captain 14th Dragoons.*"

And these last words were underlined in pencil.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEBT IS PAID.

TWENTY-FOUR hours only had elapsed when Walter paid his second professional visit to Willowbank; yet in that short interval, as he could perceive by the manner of his host and hostess, some important incident had taken place. Mr. Brown was fussy and nervous; Lilian was nervous too, though her bright eyes and cheerful tone betokened an unusual elevation of spirits. Nothing was said explanatory of this until the three were in the painting-room, and Walter had settled to his work.

Then, "Your picture is coming home to-day, Mr. Litton," observed the old merchant sententiously.

"My picture! What! from the Academy, sir? Nay; that is impossible."

“Well, if not your picture, the living likeness of it. You did not know perhaps that I had another daughter—Lilian’s twin-sister?”

“Yes, sir, I knew it.”

“Well, perhaps you know then that she has been separated from us by an unfortunate disagreement; in fact, I objected to her marriage, though she married well, as the world calls it—that is, in point of position. Her husband is Sir Reginald Selwyn, Baronet of the United Kingdom.”

The air with which the self-made man delivered himself of this remarkable piece of information was something stupendous. If it had not been for Lilian’s presence, and for one other reason, Walter would have burst out laughing. The other reason was the somewhat serious difficulty of his own position; as to how much he should own to being cognisant of; how much he ought to pretend that he was hearing for the first time. Upon the whole he thought it best to hold his tongue, and bow.

“Yes, sir, my daughter is Lady Selwyn——”

The old gentleman hesitated, as though

he were in doubt whether to add "also of the United Kingdom" or not. "She has been a stranger to her home for many months; but she is coming hither with her husband to dine to-day. I hope you will join us?"

"Certainly, if you wish it, Mr. Brown. But perhaps on such an occasion——"

"A stranger might be in the way, you think," interrupted the old gentleman. "On the contrary, we should prefer it. It will tend to make matters go more smoothly. You have yourself too had a hand in the matter—unwittingly, it is true—but still we feel, both Lilian and myself, indebted to you for Philippa. It cannot indeed be considered a portrait, for Lotty is all smiles and brightness; but there is a something in it which has reminded me of her very much. At all events we associate you, if you will permit us to do so, with this auspicious meeting."

Never before had Mr. Christopher Brown delivered himself of such sentiments, or given evidence of possessing such a graceful eloquence. That the speech had been prepared, neither of his hearers could for a

moment doubt, but whence could he have culled this flowery style? Could it have been *caught*, thought Walter, from his connexion — indirect as it was — with the “Peerage and Baronetage of the United Kingdom” already?

“Under these circumstances,” continued the old gentleman, “we hope you will not refuse to meet Sir Reginald and Lady Selwyn at our table to-day?”

“I shall be most pleased,” said Walter; then feeling that something more than pleasure was expected of him from such an invitation, he added, “and honoured.”

“I am sure papa is very glad that you are going to dine with us,” said Lilian, when the old gentleman left the room. “He feels not a little embarrassment, after what has passed, in meeting Captain Selwyn, and he has never seen him, you know.”

“And I have seen him so often. Don’t you think that will be a little embarrassing for *me*?” inquired Litton comically.

“No; because he thoroughly understands your position. I have written to dear Lotty to explain it all from beginning to end. It was for her husband’s sake and hers, not

your own, that you were silent about your previous acquaintance with him ?”

“That is true. But I feel not a little compunction in concealing so much from your father. He is so kind and hospitable to me ; and I feel as though I had gained his goodwill by false pretences.”

“I quite understand your feelings, Mr. Litton ; but I really do not see how matters could have been managed otherwise. I am sure if he had known that you had been acquainted with my sister, and especially your share in her elopement (for such he considers it), he would not have been so moved by your picture ; indeed, he might very possibly have believed it to be a concerted plan between you and her husband ; and you know it is not as if she had really sat to you. The likeness, if not absolutely accidental, was not designed ; you had never even seen her as you have represented her.”

“That may be all very true, but I am far from satisfied with my own conduct. Don't you think, Miss Lilian, that now, when all has turned out so well, it would be better to make a clean breast of it and tell your father ?”

“Oh, *pray* don't, Mr. Litton,” she pleaded. “You don't know how large a share you have had—even papa admitted it just now—in this happy reconciliation. Without you—that is, without your help, unintentional, but yet to which I am sure Lotty has been so welcome—all this would never have been brought about. Mrs. Sheldon's letter of itself would have done nothing, had not papa been already as it were prepared for it; and remember, it has all been done for my dear father's good, for his happiness. He is not like the same man since his heart has been softened towards Lotty. Oh, please don't let us run any risk.”

“It shall be as you wish,” sighed Walter, “and still, as they say in the melodramas, ‘I will dissemble.’ After all, it is only my own character for straightforwardness, not yours, I am glad to think, that is in danger; only when the truth does come out, and your father turns me out of his house as an impostor, I hope you will say a good word for me, Miss Lilian.”

“Indeed, indeed I will, Mr. Litton. But as for turning you out of the house, that is nonsense. In fact, what necessity is there

for the truth, as you call it—that is, for the facts of a case which you have never been asked to speak about—coming out at all? It is very much more to Captain Selwyn's interest than to yours that you should be considered a stranger to him. Oh, Mr. Litton," she continued, suddenly bursting into tears, "I am afraid you are thinking hardly of me. I do not love deceit; I hate it: I hate myself for counselling you to hide the truth; it is only that of the two evils—the deceiving my father for his own good; and the telling him all, with the dreadful risk of his forgiveness to Lotty being cancelled—I honestly believe that I am choosing the less."

"I quite understand you, dear Miss Lilian," answered Walter earnestly, and his voice was low and soft as her own as he spoke the words; "I quite understand; nor have I for a moment imputed to you any other motive save that which has actuated you, and which—whether it be wise or not—seems to me to do you nothing but honour. My only desire is to serve you and yours, and all that you wish shall be done in your own way."

Here he held out his hand, and she put hers in his, and pressed it thankfully. It was only as it were in ratification of their little compact; but at the touch of that small palm Walter's pulses began to throb in a fashion which—if we did not know how very sensible a young man he was, and with what admirable arguments he had steeled himself against the indulgence of futile hopes—was almost like the spring-time of Love itself.

She did well to be grateful to him, for he was doing for her and one other what he would have done for no one else. Concealment of any kind, and far more deception, was abhorrent to Walter. He had reproached himself all along for the part he had been playing at Willowbank in relation to his host, notwithstanding all these arguments which Lilian had urged in its favour, and which he had already applied to the case in his own mind; but he had resolved, when the reconciliation between Lotty and her father should have been accomplished, that he would tell all to him, and relieve himself at any cost from this irksome burden. And now he had been persuaded to carry it still.

longer in spite of a certain penalty that would be very grievous to him, more grievous indeed than he dared to own, but which he now foresaw would sooner or later be the consequence of his so doing. In one respect he thought he judged the old merchant's character more accurately than his own daughter; and he did verily believe that the day on which Christopher Brown discovered himself to have been deceived would be the last he (Litton) would ever pass at Willowbank. Such a sentence of exile would be very bitter to him (more bitter, as I have said, than he would have liked to confess even to himself), and yet he had promised to risk its infliction; and there was one thing certain—he would keep his word. Walter Litton was, upon the whole, an impulsive man; his impulses were good, which was fortunate, since he acted on them rather than on fixed convictions. Of the possession of the thing called “principle,” in connexion with any well-defined system of religion or philosophy, he could not boast: he did what was right—such as an act of generosity, for instance—because it seemed to him right at the moment. He

never went home and looked at the matter this way and that, and upon the whole decided that it was "contrary to principle," and therefore didn't do it. I have no doubt that would have been the right way for him to go to work; but yet it is certain that most such proceedings in our mental parliament do end in the "Noes" having it; and I have always noticed that stingy persons are possessed of very high principles indeed. But though he was so deficient in this respect, there was one thing to which Walter held with the tenacity of a martyr to his faith—and that was, his word. He might be wrong in doing so—he sometimes was, just as the martyr is wrong—but he stuck to it all the same. He was wrong, as I venture to think, in this particular case; but he had given his word to Lilian, and therefore she did well to be grateful, for it was irrefragable. Have you noticed, reader, what kind of person it is—you may not have done so, for the genus is very rare—whose word is thus to be depended upon? It is generally a woman, or, if not a woman, a man of feminine type; one whose physique,

whose voice, whose manner, do not impress one very forcibly, or give one much assurance of power—delicate-handed, soft-voiced creatures, in whom such resolution is quite an unexpected trait, and which we resent the more in them from that very circumstance. “Obstinate as a mule,” we call such a man, who opposes himself to our wishes, just because he has promised to do this or that; or, if it be not a man, “A self-willed little slut.”

Walter did not stay on at Willowbank till dinner-time on this occasion. His host dropped no word as before of there being no necessity for evening dress; the coming of Sir Reginald Selwyn, Baronet of the United Kingdom (which he was not, by-the-bye, but his father-in-law had picked the phrase up and found it pleasant, like a sweet morsel rolled under the tongue), and of Her Ladyship, his wife, was a circumstance that seemed to Mr. Christopher Brown imperative of evening dress; so Walter went home to attire himself. He found a letter awaiting his arrival, enclosing a cheque for fifty pounds, and a few lines from the captain:—

“MY DEAR LITTON,—I enclose the pair of ponies, for which accept my best thanks. You are of course aware that the old gentleman has come round, that it is a case of ‘Bless you, my children,’ and ‘Welcome home.’ This all comes, as I told you it would, of my having become a Baronet. Only an Irish one, it is true; but then, you know, with some people, even ‘Lord Ballyraggum is better than no lord at all.’ My wife desires her kind regards.

“Yours faithfully,

“REGINALD SELWYN.

“P.S.—Think of your having struck up an acquaintance upon your own account with my new papa! How small the world is, after all!”

Walter read this missive more than once, and with much more attention than its contents would have seemed to deserve. It was not a gracious letter, nor, though its style was so familiar, did it smack much of ancient friendship. If the captain knew that his friend was intimate at Willowbank, he must surely also know how that intimacy

had come about ; and therefore must be aware that the reconciliation was by no means solely due to his fire-new title. Walter was not a man to look for "a return" for any good service, even in the shape of an expression of gratitude, but this total ignoring of what he had done in the matter was not quite pleasant. The phrase, "struck up an acquaintance," and especially the words which followed it, "on your own account," seemed indeed almost offensive. He studied the epistle thus carefully, in order to learn from it, if possible, whether little Red Riding-hood had told Selwyn from whose lips she had received the information that had disappointed his designs. Upon the whole, Walter thought that she *had* told him, or if not, that he had guessed the truth. There was a "stand-at-guard" air about the letter, which was not in his friend's usual style, though it was not absolutely hostile. He was less indifferent to this than he would have been at the time he bade Nellie use his name ; not only because time had mitigated his wrath against the captain, but because he did not wish to have an enemy.

at Willowbank. He deemed it probable, as I have said, that sooner or later he should be banished thence, but he wished to put off that banishment as long as possible. What seemed very strange, even to himself, was that this was the first consideration that occurred to him ; and not the reflection that within an hour or so he was about to meet Lotty for the first time since her marriage, and in her father's house.





CHAPTER XVII.

SIR REGINALD PROGRESSES.

THERE is many a dinner-party that is not a party of pleasure, although our inviter may have designed it to be so in all good faith. It is not pleasant, for example, to be asked to meet a creditor, who is rarely at the same time one's friend ; nor a man to whom, from any cause, it is necessary to make oneself civil, if one is not inclined to be so ; nor some very great personage indeed, the satisfaction of meeting whom consists solely, if there be any, in the being able to boast of it afterwards ; nor one's old love as a newly married woman ; nor one's old friend, with whom there is a feeling of estrangement. Perhaps these last two are the most unpleasant to meet of all, and they were both

awaiting Walter Litton that evening. He was to meet them also in the presence of a host who was unconscious of his acquaintance with them, and from whom he had designedly concealed that circumstance. He would have to act a part, and one that he felt he was ill adapted to fill, throughout that evening, and perhaps for many evenings to come. It seemed to him that this was infringing the laws of hospitality, and soiling by ignoble use that name of gentleman of which he had hitherto thought himself worthy.

Without having any exaggerated opinion of himself, Walter had up to this time found himself perfectly at ease in any society to which he had been admitted, and had imagined, and with reason, that so it would have been in all cases ; he was not dazzled by rank and show, though it was intuition rather than experience which had convinced him of their emptiness ; his very simplicity made him natural in his manners ; and natural manners—when the nature is good—are the best in the world. But on this occasion, while he attired himself for that little party at Willowbank, he felt like a

girl who is going to her first ball—flurried, and nervous, and excited, and rehearsing to himself those little speeches which are so certain not to be remembered when the time comes for their due delivery. His difficulty, like hers, was that he could not foresee what others would say to him ; he did not know what attitude the captain might adopt towards him, nor how far either he or Lotty would assist him in feigning a mutual ignorance of one another. So embarrassing was his dilemma that he actually found himself considering whether it would be better for him to arrive late or early at Willowbank ; in the end he determined on going early, since he could then have no surprise sprung on him by the gallant captain—of whom he had suddenly grown unaccountably suspicious—in the way of judgment being passed against him by default. It would be clearly a disadvantage to him to enter the drawing-room without knowing what had passed at the first meeting of Sir Reginald with his “papa.” This plan turned out even better than he had anticipated, for his cab drew up at the front door at the same moment

as the very respectable brougham which conveyed the baronet and his bride, and the three met in the hall. Their mutual greeting was sufficiently guarded not to excite suspicion in the servants, yet warm enough to establish an understanding between themselves; and they entered the drawing-room together, like guests who have already made one another's acquaintance, and who need no further introduction. That was the ordeal indeed from which Walter had shrunk from most of all—the moment when his host should say: “Mr. Litton—my daughter,” or “Mr. Litton—Sir Reginald,” because it would necessitate an overt act of hypocrisy as it were on his part, whereas up till then he had only deceived by his silence. This unpleasantness was now altogether avoided, partly by the circumstance I have mentioned, and partly because the position was too grave and peculiar to admit of mere conventional observances. The old merchant was standing stiffly by the fireplace when the three guests were announced; but the sight of his daughter was too much for the dignity he strove to maintain, and he stepped quickly forward and embraced her

tenderly; then he offered his hand to her husband with a frank "I am glad to see you, Sir Reginald," and almost immediately afterwards to Walter himself. The ceremony of reconciliation was, in fact, made as short as possible; but for all that, it was plain that it was not without its effect upon the host, who, disinclined, or perhaps unable, to speak more, gazed with tears in his eyes at his two daughters as they rushed into each other's arms. It was only natural therefore, and in accordance with good taste, that Selwyn and Litton should affect to ignore his emotion, and enter into conversation together.

"If he asks you whether you have ever met 'Sir Reginald' before, Litton, you can say no, with truth," whispered the captain hastily; "and the same holds good with regard to her ladyship yonder." This specious method of evading the difficulty had certainly not occurred to Walter, and did not recommend itself to him now, but nevertheless he replied: "All right, old fellow; I'll do my best." And then they fell to talking aloud upon indifferent topics. While they did so Walter could scarcely

keep his eyes off Lotty. Cloaked and hooded as she had been on her arrival, he had had no time to observe her fully ; but now, in the brilliantly-lit drawing-room, he noticed with pain how cruelly care had dealt with her brightness and beauty ; so cruelly indeed that, knowing what he did, he could not but suspect that not only care, but neglect and unkindness, must have had their share in effecting such a change. Her face had lost its rounded lines, its delicate tints, and had become sharp and wan ; her eyes were red, which could scarcely have been accounted for by the tears that she was weeping then ; her trembling lips smiled indeed, but as though smiles were strangers to them ; nay, the burden of sorrow seemed to have weighed upon her very frame, for her carriage had lost all the grace of girlhood.

He had feared for her some fate of this sort, and under the apprehension of it had portrayed her, as we know, from imagination ; but so far had the actual change outstripped his fears, that, forgetting for the moment that the old man, like himself, had made a picture of her in his mind more con-

sonant with the portrait than with the original, he almost marvelled how his picture could have recalled her to her father's remembrance. It was evident that the old merchant perceived this change himself, for he regarded Lotty with an expression of wistful tenderness that he took no pains to conceal; but in all probability he set it down solely to her long exile from home, and loved her, we may be sure, no less that absence from his arms and roof had wrought such woe with her. He did not even apologize to Walter, when, upon dinner being announced, he offered his own arm to Lotty, and Selwyn of course taking Lilian, the young painter was left to bring up the rear of the little party alone. Except, however, in these tacit evidences of his affection and forgiveness, the host seemed resolved in no way to allude to the cause that had led to the dismemberment of his family; and his guests were only too glad to maintain a similar silence upon that topic.

The conversation at first was somewhat scanty and constrained, but never so much so as to become embarrassing; and as the good wine circulated which had been so long

a stranger to the captain's palate, it moved his always fluent tongue to animated talk. His native sagacity taught him to avoid jesting under what he afterwards described as those "rather ticklish" circumstances, and even to sink that tone of careless frivolity which was habitual to him; but he narrated incidents of his military career in a cheerful and entertaining style. Instinct told him that the army was not a profession that was popular with his new-found father-in-law, and therefore he confined himself to such anecdotes as would be most likely to interest an outsider. Had he been but a mere captain in the Heavies, he might not have succeeded so easily in gaining Mr. Brown's attention; but that gentleman's ear, like those of many others of his class, was particularly formed to receive the narrations of persons of quality; and though he made some considerable resistance to the voice of the charmer, in the way of interruptions and objections—as if in protest against injured fathers-in-law being placed at once on too familiar a footing—he, in the end, accorded him a sufficiently gracious hearing. The story

that pleased him most, and the one which the cunning captain had kept in reserve with that very object for after dinner, was the one known in military circles as "the tale of the Golden Lions," a sort of typical narrative which shifts its date to suit the times, and which, since the captain's day, has been permanently attached to the taking of the Chinese emperor's Summer Palace: but it does, in fact, pertain to an earlier epoch of British warfare—namely, that of the first Chinese war, in which the captain's colonel was engaged, and who (unless we are so bold as to disbelieve a baronet) told it to him with his own lips.

"It was about that opium business, as you doubtless remember, sir," said the captain, addressing himself to his host, "that the war was begun which ended in the opening of the ports."

"I remember it well, Sir Reginald," observed Mr. Brown. "I was stopped on my way to business, for the first time in my life, from mere curiosity to see the waggons that brought home the Chinese indemnity pass along the street. There were twenty-one million of silver dollars—twenty-one

million," repeated the old gentleman, smacking his lips, for the mention of a large sum of money was always music to him.

"That was the precise sum," said the captain deferentially; "though I should not have ventured to state it from my own recollection."

"Ay, but I don't forget such things," said the other, much pleased to find his own memory so complimented. "It was the only war in which this country has been engaged through which we ever reaped a pecuniary advantage; that is one of the reasons why I am a peace-at-any-price man, and am not ashamed to own it, Sir Reginald."

It was probable that the captain's opinion of peace-at-any-price men was not a very high one, but you would never have supposed so, had you seen his polite and almost assenting bow.

"Well, I was about to observe, sir, that large as that indemnity was, my present colonel—Markham—then a lieutenant in a foot regiment, had it once within his power (had he but known it) to have returned home with even a larger sum to his own

cheek—I mean, at his private account at his banker's," added the captain hurriedly. His speech was apt to be garnished by slang terms; and though, as he had proved, he could put a restraint upon himself in all important matters, these little verbal eccentricities would occasionally escape him. "It was just before the preliminaries of peace were signed, and while the troops were before Canton——"

"It was Nankin, if it was anywhere," observed Mr. Brown severely, for that notion of "one's own cheek," as being synonymous with one's banker's account, had savoured to him of something like profanity.

"I daresay you are right, sir; but at all events Markham himself, with a company or so of his regiment, found themselves separated from the main body of the army; they were on a foraging expedition, or more likely a marauding one, for Markham's captain had always an eye for 'loot,' and had ventured much farther into the interior of the country than he had any authority for doing. They knew that the war was at its close, you see, and that if anything valuable

was to be got it was to be picked up at once."

"Upon my life, Sir Reginald," said the old merchant, "your tale, so far as it is gone, is not very complimentary to your cloth."

"Well, you see, there are soldiers and soldiers: with some, all is fair in love and war—that is, in war."

The slip was terrible. Most men in the speaker's position would have thought it irreparable, and given up their anecdote altogether; but the captain was made of cooler stuff.

"Of course it's wrong," he continued; "but there will be soldiers of fortune as long as the world lasts, like Major Dalgetty."

"Is he in your regiment also?" inquired Mr. Brown, with severity.

"O no, sir; I merely instanced him as the sort of man I am talking about. They are often good soldiers, and serve the State as well as themselves, we must remember. Look at Clive, for example, and—and—oh, a lot of fellows."

It was now Mr. Brown's turn to bow,

which he did in very qualified adhesion to these sentiments.

“ Well, Bob Markham and the rest marched a good way up the country—the people fleeing before them—till they reached a certain imperial residence of which they were in search. It was very splendidly furnished, and of course they sacked it. The walls of one room were lined with silver plates of half an inch thick—with the proceeds of some of which, by-the-bye, Bob afterwards purchased his company. There had been hopes of jewels, I believe; but these had been removed, in anticipation of their visit; but altogether it was a great haul, and very glad they were to get back to camp with it—those, that is, that managed to do so, for they were cut off by the imperial troops, and had to fight their way through them. But the curious thing was that the Chinese themselves could never be persuaded that our men had reached the palace. They showed their silver plates; but those carried no conviction. ‘Such splendours,’ they said, ‘were to be found in the house of many a rich mandarin. Had you really been to Bong-

gata-boo (or whatever its name was), you would certainly have brought back its golden lions.’”

“ ‘What golden lions?’ ” asked Markham, rather irritably, for he did not relish not being believed about such a matter, for the expedition had been a very smart thing.

“ ‘Why, the lions that guard the gates ; you must have passed between them, if you ever got inside.’ Then he remembered that upon each pillar was a lion, in brass, as they had all supposed, about eight feet high, which some of the soldiers had pricked with their bayonets.

“ ‘Well, what about them?’ ” he asked. ‘I saw the lions, of course.’

“ ‘Only, that they are of solid gold, and the richest prizes in all China,’ was the reply.

“ Perhaps he could never have got back alive with them ; he always protests that he could not ; but he and his men had beasts of burden with them, and other means of carriage ; and he has often told me in confidence that it could have been done, had it ever entered into his mind that the images were of the precious metal.

Then he tears his hair (what little is left of it), and proclaims himself the unluckiest dog alive, since he is only a colonel of Heavies, when he might, but for the merest chance, have been a millionaire, Mr. Brown, like yourself."

This last shot was a bold one, for it inspired no little risk to the shooter, but, fortunately for the captain, it went home. The story, with its flavour of gold about it, had greatly recommended itself to the old merchant; and this concluding hint at his own wealth, so far from making him suspicious of the captain's motives, was received with uncommon favour.

"Well, well; I don't know about being a millionaire, Sir Reginald," answered he complacently; "but I have reaped the usual reward of much frugality and toil. If you wont take any more wine, young gentleman, we will join the ladies."





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